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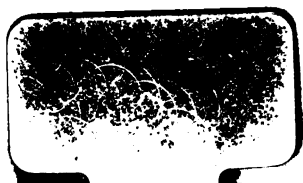
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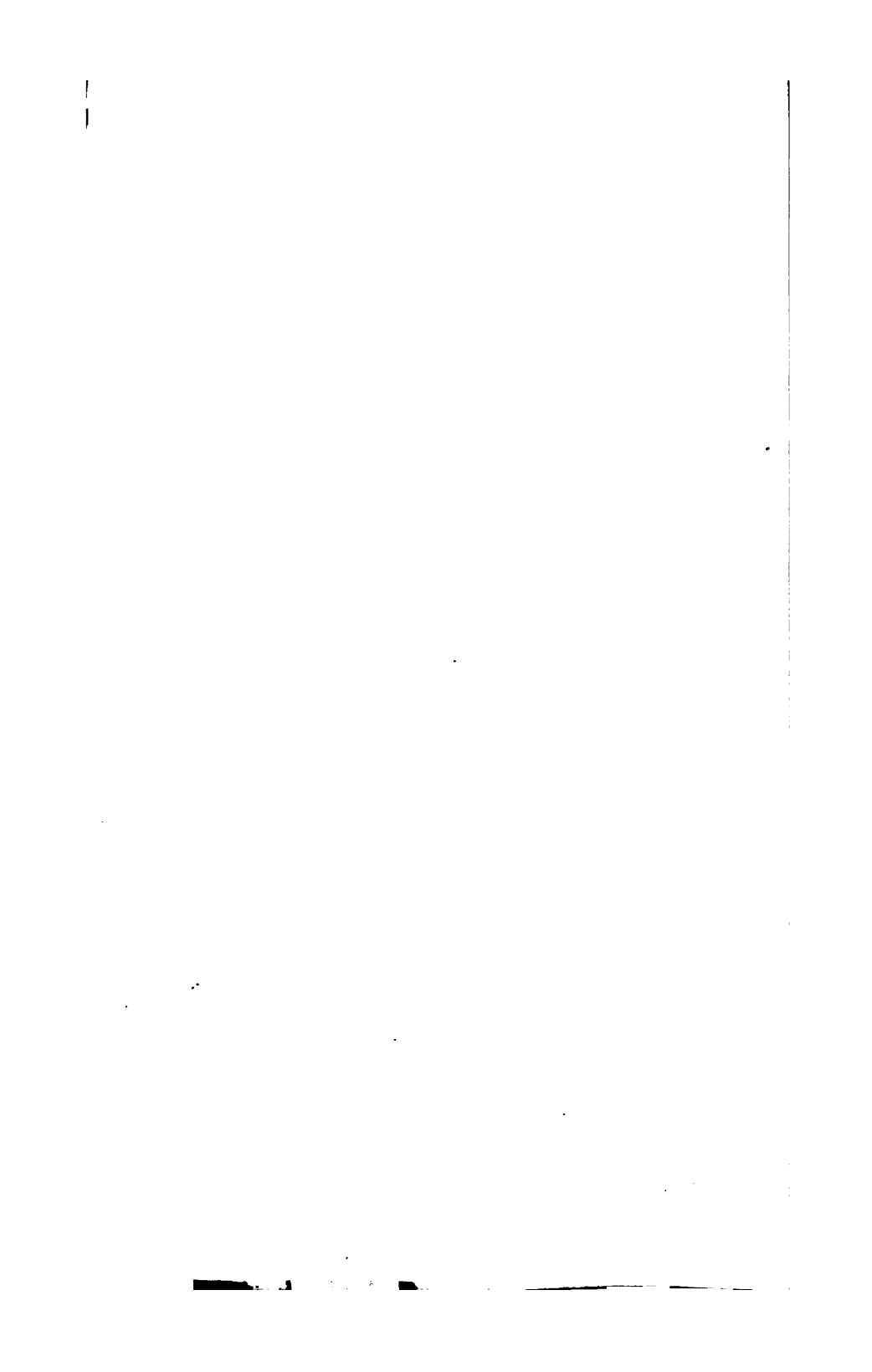
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ROSA GREY;

OR,

THE OFFICER'S DAUGHTER.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"ANNE DYSART," "HERBERT LAKE."

&c. &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



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ROSA GREY;

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CHAPTER I.

It was a cold, raw afternoon, when Rosa, in compliance with the invitation recorded in the end of the last volume, set out to dine with the Turners. She speculated anxiously in her own mind on the chances of the doctor's being able to afford her any assistance in procuring a situation; but the more she thought of it the less likely it seemed.

Her hopes sank very low. The little glow

she had felt the morning after her arrival at Birken-side had faded away. A reaction had succeeded, and life appeared to stretch out drearily and friendlessly before her. Perhaps the cheerless aspect of the day, and of the dull, dirty, little town, with its muddy streets and weather-stained houses, contributed to depress her spirits. Nor did the sight of Dr. Turner—her only hope—whom, on her arrival at her destination, she found at home, tend to raise them. After her long absence, and with a higher standard of manners, she felt his vulgarity even more than in former days. In appearance the worthy doctor was quite unchanged.

He was as fat, fair, shining, and pompous as ever. He received her kindly, but Rosa felt somehow from the first moment that his kindness was less respectful and more patronising than of old. He had always been a little more familiar than she liked, but now his familiarity seemed tinged with a slight mixture of condescension. Many of the little minutæ

of politeness were omitted both by him and Grace, who, next to himself, was the presiding genius of the household. They were anxious, perhaps more anxious than formerly that Rosa should have a good dinner, but Grace walked out of the room before her without apologising, and the doctor did not set a chair for her as he used always to do of old with ostentatious gallantry. Rosa could not at first quite understand the change but at last it dawned upon her. She knew more of the world now than she had done a year ago, and she began to perceive that in the eyes of the Turners, the disgraced dependent in search of a situation was a very different person from the supposed favourite niece of a lady of wealth and station. As soon as the cloth was removed from the dinner-table and the doctor had mixed his steaming tumbler of *toddy*, he began ;

“ So it seems, Rosa, you are wanting a situation. I confess it took me quite by surprise to hear it. I fancied you had been quite in a dif-

ferent way, a cut above us as it were, instead of standing in need of our help. However, you may depend on my doing what I can for you and with my connection among the aristocratic families in the neighbourhood, and I may say the respect they entertain for me, I have something in my power. Not however that you will be looking for anything high I suppose. Beggars mustn't be choosers—hey!”

“I shall be glad to earn my own bread in any honest way to begin with, and wait an opportunity of bettering my condition.”

“Stay!” said the doctor; “I think I know a place that might do for you—occasional patient of mine, a great invalid. She lives about ten miles off—there is a sort of apothecary near her, but of course when she is seriously ill, she requires skill—a different sort of practitioner altogether, Rosa. I heard a week or two ago by chance that she was on the look out for a companion. She is a very superior person, but has her peculiarities—a woman of family, Lady Isa-

bella MacWhin, sister of the Earl of Peatmuir, and she has a good fortune in right of her mother. That is the way she lives in the south. She is considered rather *high* I believe. But for my part I find no fault with people being aware of their own place. Lady Isabella is always remarkably polite to *me*. They say she has a very particular temper—all invalids have, but if she would take you, she would pay you well. Not that she is careless of money. They tell me she looks after everything herself when she is well, and she is so particular about everything. I will apply myself for the situation for you, Rosa ; and as to her ladyship being a little humoursome, humble companions have always to put up with humours."

Although this description of Lady Isabella was not very alluring, Rosa acquiesced in thinking it advisable to enquire about the situation. This resolution agreed upon unanimously, there commenced once more a cross fire of questions from Grace and her father, all relating either to Mrs.

Clifden or to Riversthaite. Rosa gave all the information she was able without betraying the real reason of her departure. She felt thankful that the Turners did not know of the existence of such a person as Mr. Robert Clifden, otherwise the attempt would have been almost hopeless. As it was, they had evidently not the slightest suspicion of a love affair. Neither of the young ladies had ever had yet a serious flirtation, and they were both older than Rosa. Nor did they fancy Rosa at all a person likely to inspire a violent passion. Indeed they had merely a speculative belief in the existence of any such thing. They thought it a very difficult matter to get married, and a matter that was only to be accomplished by years of smart dressing, and persevering flirting. How then could they ever have dreamt of little Rosa Grey's having a lover !

When Rosa had answered all the numerous questions which had been put to her, they were succeeded by a volley of remarks from the father

and daughters on the information she had communicated.

"What a splendid place it must be !" said Helen.

"And so you had luncheon at two and dinner at six !" cried Grace. "Well ! I should have thought that at such a grand place as Rivers-thwaite, you would not have dined before seven at the very soonest."

"Nor I," said Mrs. Turner, "at the very soonest. I am surprised you dined before seven."

"Proud, upsetting woman your aunt must be !" said the doctor, "I always thought so. A vain, empty kind of woman ! A very different kind of woman from Lady Isabella Mac Whin, who, though a woman of family, with some of the noblest blood in Scotland in her veins, the daughter and sister of an Earl, is always most agreeable. You would never find out she had a title and was so wealthy. She chats with me in the most friendly manner, just like anybody

else. I had once a letter from your aunt, civil enough it was, but it gave me exactly the notion of a very stuck-up woman, not at all a clever woman I should say. Lady Isabella writes such beautiful letters—her style quite splendid—indeed no author could write finer, quite different from Mrs. Clifden's. Her Ladyship is excessively intellectual."

Rosa was interested to hear all she possibly could about Lady Isabella, but feared she could not place much confidence in Doctor Turner's report of her literary qualifications. She recalled to mind with a feeling of bewilderment, almost fancying she must have dreamt it, an opinion he had once pronounced upon Mrs. Clifden's letter, so very contrary to that he now gave with the same decision. What could he mean? for whatever new light he might have got from her upon her aunt's character, the letter of course was the same now it had always been, and indeed Doctor Turner appeared completely to have forgotten he had ever admired it.

A very faint glimmer of the truth dawned upon her mind, but now as formerly, she came to the conclusion that the worthy doctor's critical talents were not greatly to be depended on.

When Rosa returned to Nelly at night, she related the occurrences of the day. The latter pondered thoughtfully and sternly over the suggestion of Lady Isabella MacWhin ere she gave an opinion. When she did, it was a sensible one.

"I've heard tell o' her. She bides at High-riggs—a bonny place. She's bidden there mony a year. It belonged her mither's own father, that is Leddy Isabel's great-grandfather. He made a heap o' money i' Lunnun, and bought the place. But it was aye let, so I hae heard my faither say, for I dinna mind mysel, and folk kenned naething aboot them till the 'Leddy Isabel cam here to bide. Folk say she's rael guid till the puir folk; but she's never weel I've heard tell, and thae kind o' folk are aye humoursome; still it wad be better than learning a heap o' unruly bairns; and they say she's very rich and

free wi' her money ; and aiblin she micht tak a fancy to yer bonny face. Ye could try't at ony rate, hinny, and if ye didna like it, it's only ten miles for ye to come back to Nelly."

The following morning Dr. Turner rode over to Highriggs, and in the evening despatched a message to Rosa to come to hear the result of his visit. When Rosa arrived, she found the doctor without his coat, lounging on a sofa :

" See what a heat I have put myself into in your service."

Rosa was beginning to express her regret that he was fatigued, when he interrupted her by telling her that he was always ready to serve a friend in need. He then put on his coat again, and resuming a dignified attitude on the sofa, began in a formal way, his wife and daughters listening with admiring satisfaction :

" I called on her Ladyship. She was confined to her own room, but when she heard who it was, she gave orders I should be admitted. Her Ladyship said she would have admitted no

one else. Her Ladyship was looking pale and thin, *shilpit* as I remarked to her Ladyship, at which she smiled. After I had prescribed for her, I told her I had not come professionally, but that I heard she was in want of a companion, on which her Ladyship replied she was tired of looking for one, and had tried so many she feared she should never get one to suit her, but that she could not do without one to read to her. She then asked if I knew of any one. Of course I put in a good word for you, said I knew from experience that you were a good reader and a first-rate nurse, that I was sure you would be very submissive and mind your own station, and that though you were young and good-looking you were not much of a flirt, and had no beau, upon which her Ladyship smiled again and enquired your name and who was your father. When I told her she remarked, 'Oh, then you were a lady, and not some tradesman's daughter trying to rise in the world.' Her Ladyship is very proud in some

things. though you would not think so to speak to her. She and I always get on just like anybody else ; but in fact those people are all proud, and one cannot wonder at it. It is bred in the bone, as they say, and after all, I like to see a person of distinction knowing who they are." added the doctor, who was occasionally not very particular about grammar. He then continued,

"Of course, I told her you had very good connections, and mentioned you had an aunt, a woman of large fortune, but she did not seem to listen. These great people often do not, when they are not interested. She then said, you were more likely to suit her than anyone she had heard of, that it was always a lottery, and that she was heartily sick of the business, and that I might engage you at once, if you were willing to come. The salary at first is fifty pounds a year, but her Ladyship says money is no object if you suit her. I said, that of course you would feel very grateful, that I

was sure it was much beyond your expectations ; and then her Ladyship seeming tired, for those kind of people don't mind when they show those things, I said I would drive you over any day most convenient to her, on which she appointed this day week. Now, Rosa, I think I have done my best for you. I must say, I am gratified by the confidence her Ladyship reposes in me, and trust, my dear, you may do credit to my recommendation."

Rosa hastened to tender the expected thanks. She was indeed relieved at the prospect of being able to maintain herself, although what she had heard did not prepossess her much in favour of Lady Isabella Mac Whin. She felt, however, that if she were still to occupy an inferior position, it would yet be comparatively an independent one. She should no longer eat the bread of charity. Grace now plied her father with questions, as to what dress Lady Isabella had on, if she was working, and what her work was, if she had mentioned the Earl of Peatmuir, whom she had

seen by the paper was in London, and on hearing that Lady Isabella was busy at worsted-work, remarked that it must still be fashionable. All the remainder of the evening, nothing was talked of but Lady Isabella. The most trivial looks and speeches were recorded. Rosa listened with some interest to conversation which at another time would have been insupportably tiresome, with the hope of being able to glean some notion of the character of her new patroness. But the information she elicited was not very definite. That she was a great invalid and lived in great retirement, was very charitable, a little eccentric, and very proud, she was led to think probable by all she heard.

The week that intervened before her leaving Birkenside was spent chiefly in restoring her wardrobe. On the morning of her departure, with some embarrassment, she would have slid two or three sovereigns into Nelly's hand, but the latter drew back :

“ Guide us a' ! The lassie's clean wud. I'll

hae nane o' yer money, hinny. Ye ha been paying me a visit, an' I'm prood o't. No I wunna ha't. Pit it away, my lamb! I dinna like to see't, for I'm ower fond about it, and if I were to tak it I wad tak shame to mysel. Ye'r no ower proud to tak a week's lodgin frae me, Miss Rosa."

"No, Nelly. I am not proud," cried Rosa putting the tempting gold again into her pocket. As soon as it had vanished, Nelly drew a deep breath of relief, and said,

"The Bible says, 'the love o' money's the root o' a' evil,' and I kind o' believe it. Folk may be ower careless about it though, and ye maunna thraw it away that gate, hinny. If ye had been to pay me, ten shillings wad ha' been plenty."

"Oh but, Nelly, you have been so kind, you have done so much for me."

"Ye've dune mair for me, hinny, if it had been naething else but taking back the gowd. I hae a feeling at my heart, my lamb, I

haena had I canna mind the time. God bless yer bonny, kind face, Miss Rosa. Ye can gie me nae sic plesure as to let me serr ye and feel ye're no misdoubting me."

Rosa could only wring Nelly's hand, while she whispered anxiously—

"I think a letter *must* come for me, Nelly. You will take good care of it."

Nelly only replied by a significant and approving glance, and once more Rosa left Birkenside to enter upon a new home.

"I think," said Nelly as she followed her to the gate of her little garden, "the doctor micht ha come doon here for ye in his gig, and no ta'en ye trailing a' the way there on fit."

"It is not very far to go, Nelly," answered Rosa, who was somewhat of the same opinion. She had now, however, learnt that though there are many persons who will do a substantial kindness to those who are in need, the number is very few indeed of those who are capable of that higher and more refined class of kindness,

which addresses itself solely to the feelings, and is called politeness.

What the world calls politeness is generally reserved for superiors or at least for equals in worldly station, and is not in reality politeness, but vulgarity, and vanity of the grossest description.

CHAPTER II.

IT was about two o'clock on a sunshiny September day that Rosa drove in at the lodge gate of her new home.

Highriggs was as unlike Riversthwaite as it could possibly be, both in situation and character. It had no pretensions to the mansion-like dignity of the latter, but though large, belonged rather to the villa class of residence both in the architecture and grounds. The latter were neat, well-kept, and trim, the lawns gorgeous with

flower-beds, filled with brilliant autumnal flowers, and the shrubberies adorned with rare and graceful shrubs. The house was built to imitate an Italian villa, with a lodge to match, and nothing could be more unlike the massive and imposing stateliness of Rosa's late home, than its light colonnade of white stone, and its air of modern elegance. The ground around was undulating and open, and standing on an eminence, which commanded a fine view of a well-wooded, well-watered, and well-cultivated country—lovely, as the shadows of the autumn clouds now flitted over its fair features, but wanting in the romantic originality and impressiveness which invested the ancient woods and wild hills of Riversthaite.

A footman showed Doctor Turner and Rosa Grey into a drawing-room, the luxuriant and elegant furniture of which had as little resemblance as possible to the heavy grandeur of that at Riversthaite. The doctor pointed out with mingled admiration and reverence, the handsome mirrors, the beautiful china and glass, the buhl

cabinets, the marble consoles, and softly-cushioned seats, while Rosa herself admired the skilful arrangement of the light, the beautiful creeping flowers which almost came in at the open windows, and the arches so skilfully cut in the trees on the opposite side of the smooth, green lawn, affording vista-like views of the soft scenery beyond. Highriggs appeared to Rosa a little paradise, and impressed her favourably with the taste of its mistress, though at the same time she acknowledged there was something in Rivers-thwaite which far more powerfully affected the imagination, and in time, at least, was calculated more strongly to attach the feelings.

She and Doctor Turner had been seated about five minutes, when a neat, pretty lady's-maid entered the room to say that her lady would see the doctor in her own boudoir. The latter was not absent more than a quarter of an hour, but to Rosa the time seemed interminable. At last, however, he returned, looking more pompous than Rosa had ever seen him. He looked as if

he had just emerged from the presence of the daughter and sister of a peer, and as if some of the effulgence of her presence yet rested upon him.

“I have just seen Lady Isabella, my dear. Her Ladyship feels very low to-day, cannot see you now. Her Ladyship is a great sufferer. You must be very attentive and submissive to her Ladyship. Her Ladyship is disposed to think well of you from my representations. A protégé of mine I knew she would receive with greater than ordinary favour. Her condescension to me has always been remarkable. You would not, at least *I* should never find out from her manner that she was an Earl's daughter. Perhaps, you know, she may show a little more of the hauteur of her rank to her humble companion. She said most condescendingly, ‘I am so much obliged to you, Dr. Turner, for the friendly action you have done me. Tell the young lady I am sorry I am not able to receive her personally as I feel so unwell this morning

but I have given orders she shall be properly attended to.' Her Ladyship then most politely requested me to remain to luncheon at your dinner, which she said should be ready in a quarter of an hour, but that is out of the question. My professional duties occupy, I may say, all my time and more than all if I had it, though as you see, I can make an hour or two to serve a friend. Good bye my dear. God bless you!" then adding kindly; "I have asked her Ladyship to allow you to come over to spend a day or two now and then with the girls, who will always find a corner for you if we have other guests."

As soon as the doctor was fairly gone and the retreating wheels of his gig were heard on the gravel sweep, the pretty maid re-appeared and offered to conduct Rosa to her bedroom.

And the very prettiest picture of a young lady's bed-room it was, with its fair, white hangings, its marble basin-stand, pink and white toilet-table, draperied mirror, French bed, and

elegant wardrobe. Every necessary, every comfort, almost every luxury was there. The character of Lady Isabella was therefore in more respects than one different from that of Mrs. Clifden. When Rosa had taken off her things she began to unpack and arrange her wardrobe in the receptacle intended for it. She found a positive pleasure in the beauty and taste by which she was surrounded. It seemed to throw an atmosphere of poetry over every day life, and to indicate that she should find at least some point of sympathy with her new patroness. She was yet employed in arranging her goods and chattels, when the maid returned to inform her that her dinner waited, and then smilingly offered to complete her labours.

Rosa found that the dinner and the dining-room corresponded with all she had hitherto seen. When her repast was concluded she was again joined by the maid, who, showing her the way to the drawing-room, delivered her lady's compliments and Miss Grey would find a piano

and books with which she trusted she might be able to amuse herself till tea-time, when her Ladyship hoped to be able to see her. As soon as she was left alone, Rosa flew first to the books on the drawing-room table; but they consisted of the usual drawing-room table books, more beautiful than intellectual. From them she turned to a row upon a shelf in a chiffoniere. They were better; mostly poetry, or works on the fine arts, or æsthetics. A few of them were religious works, mostly modern—the selection altogether bespeaking an elegant and cultivated mind in the chooser; but a mind most probably more refined than vigorous. Rosa took down Tennyson, and was yet busy with it, when the same maid whom she had hitherto seen, returned to say,

“ Her Lady’s compliments and she should be happy to see Miss Grey in her boudoir. She did not feel well enough to come down stairs this afternoon.”

Rosa laid down her book and with a beating

heart prepared to present herself before her patroness. As she passed a long mirror she glanced at her own figure reflected therein, with a natural feeling of anxiety as to the impression her appearance was calculated to produce. She needed not, however, to have been much afraid, for she was looking uncommonly well.

Her drive had given her colour, and her eyes were dark and lustrous. She had improved much during the last year. Since her fever more especially, her face and figure had filled out, and losing their school-girlish thinness had become rounded into the fresh and blooming beauty of early womanhood. Feeling, suffering, and thinking had also given a more spiritual loveliness to her countenance and added self-possession and dignity to her manner. She looked older than she really was. One would have guessed her to be at least twenty. Yet Rosa's was by no means the kind of beauty to strike every taste, or perhaps the commonest kind of taste. The Turners thought she had fine

eyes, but beyond these, they saw nothing to admire in her. "Nobody with so dark a complexion and so large a nose could be pretty," Miss Cooper said ; while Mrs. Clifden had decided in her own mind that if she was a beauty at all, she was a gentleman's beauty, and marvelled at the want of taste in her nephew, who could prefer an awkward, unfashionable rustic like Rosa Grey, to the elegant and dignified Miss Cooper. It was therefore of course quite possible that Lady Isabella MacWhin might think her rustic and dark-complexioned too.

Lady Isabella's boudoir, like the drawing-room, looked out upon the flower garden, the graceful birch trees and the fair view beyond. It was furnished with the same taste, elegance, and luxury, which pervaded the whole house. The green venetian blinds were down, and through the sweet-scented creepers round the window the light came in soft and subdued. On a sofa in the shadiest part of the little room reclined the lady of the house. As far as Rosa was

able to see in the artificial twilight of the apartment, she was a woman almost beyond middle life, of the tiniest proportions, with small and delicate features, which when they were fresh and blooming must have been beautiful in the extreme. But they were now pale, thin, and withered. Her eyes, which were large, and hazel in colour, had once been very fine, but were now disfigured by a red line round the lids which gave her an appearance as if she had been weeping. The tip of her delicately shaped nose was also tinged with that clear reddish hue, which is often given by debility of constitution.

She was dressed in a loose robe of Indian silk, and wore a cap of fine point lace. Her manners were gentle and polite, the expression of her face intelligent and lady-like, but a little fretful, an effect caused perhaps, in a measure, by the redness at the tip of her nose and round her eyes. She had none of the stateliness of Mrs. Clifden, to whom she presented in appearance as complete a contrast as Highriggs did

to Riversthaite Hall. Her manners, however, though perfectly unassuming and polite, were rather chilly and distant.

"How do you do, Miss Grey? it gives me pleasure to make your acquaintance. I hope my servants have attended properly to your comfort; but remember at all times, order what you wish for yourself, for I am seldom able to attend personally to my household. Excuse my rising now. I have been very unwell all the morning—indeed I have fainted twice. I am a sad invalid, Miss Grey. It is years and years since I knew what it was to have an hour's health—not since I was almost as young as yourself."

Here Lady Isabella sighed. She was now looking at Rosa, but not in an unpolite way. The result of her inspection did not appear to have been unsatisfactory. She continued,

"I require little from you except to be with me when I am able to have any one at all. My maid generally attends me during my at-

tacks. When I am well in the evening I like to be read to. I am fond of a little quiet music. Do you play?"

Rosa answered that she could play "a little."

"I hope," continued Lady Isabella, "you do not play in that loud, noisy, clever sort of way, in which young ladies are sometimes taught to perform by third-rate masters in the present day—a style which it has always appeared to me, is intended rather to show off wonderful manual dexterity, than to fill the soul with those emotions which ought to be created by *music*."

"I have never had a master of any kind, and I am no performer, only I shall be very happy to learn if I can any kind of music you like."

"Very good. You don't look as if you would thump the piano. I detest noise of any kind, Miss Grey—loud talking, bustling motions, and slamming doors, they agitate my nerves so dreadfully. I am glad you have not a loud voice. I asked Doctor Turner particularly about that. Can you read aloud well?"

"I do not know, Madam, whether I can read well or not; but I used to read aloud to my mamma when——"

"When?"

"In her last illness."

"Poor child!" said Lady Isabella, with feeling. "Have you any brothers and sisters?"

"No—none."

"What relations have you."

"I have no blood relations, except an uncle and some cousins in America, whom I have not heard of for many years."

"You are very young, my poor girl, to be left alone in the world. Are you unhappy? excuse the question, and do not answer unless you please?"

"I have sometimes, since I was left alone, been very unhappy. It has seemed occasionally very hard to me to be condemned so young to a life of endurance. But I believe God knows best, and I sometimes feel that my murmuring thoughts are very ungrateful, for He has given me great pleasure in so many things."

Lady Isabella answered still kindly but with less of feeling than before,

“Where the capacity to enjoy is left, one has no right to complain. Material privation, even bodily suffering itself, is nothing in comparison with those mental sufferings which paralyse in apathy alike the heart and the mind, and to which, in the words, I think, of Moore,

“‘Life nothing darker or brighter can bring,
For which joy has no balm, and affliction no sting.’

“Poverty, Miss Grey, whatever you may think, is a slight evil compared with many others.”

Rosa answered thoughtfully,

“In itself, and unless in an extreme, it is so perhaps, but it entails indirectly so many other trials and mortifications.” As Rosa spoke she glanced around the little room—every article bespeaking so much wealth and luxury, and its inmate, so accustomed evidently not only to every comfort which money can procure, but to

all the respect, attention, and even adulation, which rank and wealth united usually command—and could not help thinking that if all these things were withdrawn, Lady Isabella would feel that life had another sting. And yet perhaps she had only spoken in a general way, and not of herself, though there was something in her tone which gave Rosa the idea that she had had a personal reference. Lady Isabella made no answer to Rosa's last speech. She did not seem quite to understand it, or at least she listened as if it were a mere dead truism. She then showed Rosa some needlework with which she employed herself when her eyes would permit her. It was exquisitely done, and as Rosa praised it a faint smile diffused itself over her pale, melancholy features. She then took a small volume from a little table which stood by her sofa and requested Rosa to read. The work was "Longfellow's Hyperion." Rosa, though she had heard it much spoken of, had never met with it before. It pleased her much. It

seemed, too, to suit the scene and the circumstances in which she read it.

Longfellow is essentially the poet of highly cultivated life. Even his descriptions of nature, beautiful as they are, seem to breathe the atmosphere of the drawing-room. They read more like descriptions of fine paintings, than of nature in her own life and freshness, while his moral sentiments and lessons, though in themselves healthy, are calculated to minister chiefly to the somewhat morbid class of sorrows, produced by freedom from anxieties and cares of an actual nature ; for, where there are not real, or to use a modern Germanism, where there are not objective causes of unhappiness, the mind usually finds subjective ones, and it is thus that Providence seems to strike the balance of happiness in the world. And yet to deny that Longfellow is a true poet, only shows a want of comprehension for, and sympathy with, the class of character he addresses, and consequently a narrow, though not

perhaps an unhealthy mind. His verses have awakened a responsive chord in thousands of hearts, and that must be true poetry which comes home to every human heart, with power to console, soften, and elevate.

Rosa had not begun at the beginning of the work, but according to Lady Isabella's directions, at a chapter in the second volume. After that was finished her ladyship selected another. She had read the work before, she said, but not for some time. A passage of a poem contained in it she next requested Rosa to read. Then, ere the latter could comply, she took the book from her hand and read herself the following verses:—

“ Oh Land! Oh Land!
For all the broken hearted
The mildest herald by our Fate allotted,
Beckons and with inverted touch doth stand,
To lead us with a gentle hand
Into the land of the great departed,
Into the silent land!”

“And in the meantime,” she continued,

turning over a few leaves and again beginning to read; "I enter no more into the world, but will dwell only in the world of my own thoughts. All great and unusual occurrences, whether of joy or sorrow, lift us above this earth, and we shall do well always to preserve this elevation. . . . I will sit apart and above the world, with my mournful yet holy thoughts.'" Lady Isabella read in a clear, softly modulated voice, pleasant to hear. She paused and looked up, as if thoughtful for a few seconds, then continued in a more lively tone and directly addressing Rosa,

"I dare say, my dear, you do not understand, so never mind answering. I feel so much better this evening I think I could go down to the drawing-room, and hear you play and sing a little. You said you could sing."

Rosa having replied in the affirmative, Lady Isabella arose from her couch, and though in appearance almost more fragile and delicate than her young companion had supposed when she

had seen her reclining, she walked quickly to the door, and trod lightly down stairs. Her step had little of the feebleness or heaviness of ill-health ; and though she looked pale and delicate, her countenance was so much more animated than when Rosa had first seen her, that she hardly appeared like the same person. Arrived in the drawing-room, she herself began to take down music books and portfolios of music from a large music-stand ; she pointed out several of her favourites, with some of which Rosa was acquainted. All Lady Isabella's favourites were more or less melancholy : autumn leaves, fading flowers, disappointed hopes, death, remembrance, formed the staple ideas of what she loved. Yet now she seemed almost in good spirits. Rosa was not a little fascinated, and in some measure influenced : she felt like one in some sweet, sad reverie. There was something interesting in Lady Isabella, and she felt that she was a person whom it might be possible to love ; and her heart yearned to feel affection.

When they had been in the drawing-room about an hour, Lady Isabella proposed returning up stairs. She then desired Rosa to read to her a chapter of the Bible, and when that was finished, Keble's Evening Hymn, after which she dismissed her for the night. Rosa withdrew to her pretty little room, in a gentle, soothed, pensive frame of mind. She fancied she should have a peaceful retired life at Highriggs, and such she imagined was the life best suited to her.

If she could only hear from Robert Clifden, that he was not angry with her, that they were still friends, she felt she should have little to desire. But, offended or not, there could be no doubt, she thought, that he would return some answer to her letter of farewell.

CHAPTER III.

THE following morning, shortly after breakfast, Lady Isabella sent for Rosa to read to her. Her Ladyship was still in bed. She seldom rose till one o'clock. She did not appear so well or in so good a humour as she had done the previous evening. Rosa had not read many sentences ere she was interrupted by her patroness calling out in an agitated manner, that there was a fly buzzing about the room, which drove her almost distracted, it worried her nerves so.

“ Ring the bell for Helen, Miss Grey. Do be

quick. It is on the window now and making such a noise, and oh ! it is actually coming into the bed. Is Helen never coming? You will never be able to catch it yourself, Miss Grey."

Helen came, Rosa thought in less time than possible, and they both began a chase of the blue-bottle. But for some time in vain. They jumped upon chairs and sofas, ran from the window to the chimney-piece and the chimney-piece to the bed, but without success, till at last the fly, soaring aloft, finally alighted upon the ceiling, far beyond their reach. Helen, the same pretty, good-humoured looking maid, whom Rosa had seen the previous evening, looked as if she were ready to burst into a fit of laughter, and indeed she could not suppress a slight titter.

"What are you laughing at, Helen?" her mistress called sharply from the bed, for like all sensitive persons, Lady Isabella was peculiarly alive to the slightest appearance of ridicule.

"At the fly, my Lady. It is so clever."

"I see nothing to laugh at in a fly. It is very silly, Helen, and so I have often told you to be so ready to giggle at nothing, and very wearing out to other people. Have you not caught it yet?"

"No my Lady, it is on the ceiling. I will try to reach it with the hearth-brush." As Helen spoke, armed with the instrument in question she mounted a table, while Rosa with her handkerchief tied to the end of the poker stood upon the back of the sofa.

"What a draught you are making in the room with the skirts of your dresses! I feel it giving me cold. I am sure, sure I shall have that extraordinary pain in my face I had last week. It is much worse than any toothache. How very strange you should not have caught it! I am quite knocked up already—so very provoking when I hoped I might have been able to get into the conservatory to-day. But it is always the way. Whatever I wish is prevented!" And Lady Isabella sighed.

The fly was caught at last. It alighted on the white toilet cover, and Rosa threw her pocket-handkerchief over it.

"Be sure you don't kill it, Helen," cried Lady Isabella. "Take care you don't hurt it. Take it round to the other side of the house and put it out of the window. Oh! I am so glad it is gone. I am so dreadfully exhausted."

"Shall I read again?" asked Rosa timidly after a short pause.

"Read, child! How could you think of such a thing? I could not understand a syllable. I am quite upset. You do not at all understand my debility. It is something quite peculiar. I am so very easily agitated. I do not believe anybody ever was so sensitive before. It is a great misfortune. My bodily and mental constitution are both, altogether unlike those of other people, and my life has been the same. I therefore seldom meet with sympathy and I am never understood."

Lady Isabella spoke with sadness—almost

with bitterness, yet not loudly or angrily. She was too ladylike to be coarse either in her tones or expressions. Rosa returned no answer, for indeed she knew not what answer to make ; but remained awkwardly sitting with the book in her hand not knowing whether to stay in the room or to leave it. Thus she sat for about half an hour, feeling not a little uncomfortable. At last Lady Isabella spoke again, in a more composed tone,

“I wish you would sing something to me—something plaintive—a hymn, if you know any pretty ones. I think a little music might soothe me. It is a peculiarity of mine that in certain states of my feelings nothing soothes me like music.”

Rosa looked up in some surprise, wondering if Lady Isabella could be quite serious in thinking it peculiar to herself to be soothed by music. But she dared not express her thoughts. She was yet considering what it would be best to sing, when Lady Isabella called out,

"Oh do be quick ! everybody is in a league to agitate me, and nothing agitates me like suspense, and I have had more suspense to endure in my life than ever fell to the lot of any one else. Sing anything, child ! but begin at once."

Guessing that her patroness would like Mrs. Hemans, Rosa began with the "Birds of Passage," fancying it suited to the melancholy medium, through which it was evident Lady Isabella loved to regard life. She had judged judiciously, for the invalid lay and listened to her singing, saddened and soothed—exactly the state of feeling she delighted in. Rosa had ceased for two or three minutes ere she spoke,

"I like your voice," she said ; "it is pleasant and soft, and I like your face—it is honest and refined—a rare union of expression in a countenance. Some one will love that face one day. But why do I put such things into the head of so young a girl, for I see now you are *very* young. Last night I fancied you two or three and twenty. It is time enough for you to

think about love, and indeed you will have no opportunity of thinking about it here, and so much the more fortunate for you ; and yet why should I say so ? The majority are happy enough. It is only a peculiar mind, whose destiny is peculiar and unfortunate like itself, that finds certain disappointment in affection. The mass of mankind and womankind are content with ordinary happiness and so escape extraordinary pain."

"But do you not think," said Rosa with some timidity, and not knowing whether she ought to speak, as Lady Isabella's speech was in a tone of half-soliloquy, which seemed to expect no response :

"Do you not think that many suffer, of whose sufferings one has no idea, that if we could read the hearts of others we should then see the same feelings we are apt to fancy peculiar to our own. I often imagine the under-current of life is full of a romance which though never suspected is yet the *reality*, while the

commonplace is but the smooth surface of the stream which makes us fancy there is no hidden whirlpool beneath. If we feel it so with our own lives, why should it not be the same with the lives of others. One reason why I think this, is, if it were not so, poets would write in vain. They must trust that others feel as they do though they cannot speak, and they must have felt as we do, or their words would be to us mere idle sounds—and not as they are, sympathy, consolation, or strength.”

“You are not an ordinary girl,” said Lady Isabella with some kindness and interest. “You seem to have read a good deal for your age, but the opinion you quote is a mere theory— an interesting one certainly, and one which, if it could be credited, would make the commonplace of life a problem and a mystery, instead of the flat, uninviting, dreary thing it is, except to those to whose minds nothing else has any existence. And after all they are the happiest. They ask no more and expect no more than life gives to

most who conduct themselves with sense and propriety. Look not, my dear, for higher and better things, or you will be certain to meet with disappointment. And now go walk in the grounds while I am dressing. I feel considerably better than I did an hour ago. I am a very singular person in my bodily as in my mental constitution. I have had the strangest sensations in my head for some days. Doctor Turner tells me they will go off, but I sometimes fear there is a tumour forming. Then that weakness in my limbs is certainly on the increase, and the palpitation at my heart during the past night has been worse than ever. It is not at all an ordinary kind of palpitation I assure you—it seems to me quite a peculiar case. Indeed, all my complaints are peculiar. I am certain medical men never understood them. If they had, they would never have recommended me to go into society, or to travel, which, if you would believe it possible, several of them have done. A pretty sort of person I should be to

travel or visit when a short drive knocks me up for a week, and a short chat with you or Helen makes me feel fatigued for hours. I am getting quite fatigued now. I ought not to have spoken after the fatigue of that fly. Go, my dear, I must be alone for some minutes. Oh! never mind putting the books straight!" she called out impatiently and with a heavy sigh, as if her powers of endurance were completely exhausted.

The order of the books had been deranged during the pursuit of the fly, and Rosa's sense of tidiness had induced her to put them neat on quitting the room; but she now hastily left them, and fled with precipitation. She found Helen at work in her mistress' boudoir, which was separated from the bed-room by a small ante-room. She rose on Rosa's entrance.

"I am waiting here, ma'am, to be ready to answer my Lady's bell the minute it rings, for my Lady thinks I am so long if I have to come up stairs, and she doesn't like me to come into the room unless she rings. I hope, ma'am, you

won't think me impudent or forward in what I am going to say, but you're not as well accustomed to my Lady as I am, and you musn't mind her little bits of odd ways, for she's a kind lady. Some days she'll be the whole day like what she was this morning, but I sometimes think, ma'am, she doesn't know herself she's cross, and when one's really in distress, nobody could be juster or kinder. I broke my leg last year, and though she was very ill at the time, I could hardly hinder her from attending me herself. Sometimes when my Lady is in one of her queer humours, I am like to drop down with running after her and getting all sorts of things, and feel fair worried out of my life; but I don't think she ever guesses such a thing. She's very considerate sometimes, and very generous. I never had a better place; the only thing is, it is awful dull, and I am afraid it will seem worse to a young lady like you, for I have my fellow-servants and you have nobody."

"Oh, I don't think so, Helen. It is so

pretty and quiet. I suppose I shall have a little time to myself now and then."

"Eh, ma'am? to be sure you will; but that is the worst of it. I weary more when I've nothing to do than when I'm running after my lady."

And Helen looked as if respect only kept her from yawning.

Helen was a sweet tempered, amiable, active, cheerful girl, who liked employment and society, and was very anxious to please; but she had not at all the kind of mind which is a kingdom to itself. It appeared to her that Miss Grey must feel dismal and lonely, and she was sorry for the pretty, pleasant spoken young lady, whom she liked much better than the previous companion—a prim, formal old maid—who did her duty in a punctilious manner, and provoked Lady Isabella and her maid alike by her *sang-froid* and her imperturbable, mechanical way of doing everything. She appeared to regard herself as a mere machine for reading

and playing to Lady Isabella; nothing could move her impassive nature. Lady Isabella declared that to see her fly into a passion would not irritate her half so much as her constant imperturbability. Fun, pathos, sense, poetry, seemed alike incomprehensible to her. Lady Isabella dismissed her with a handsome present, and almost made up her mind not to have another companion. For a few weeks it was a relief to be alone, but at last her Ladyship became weary of solitude and thought she would try her luck again. She resolved, however, not to take much trouble about the matter; she had hitherto given herself an immense amount of labour in making enquiries, with no favourable result. Her late companion had been so highly recommended to her that she fancied she was obtaining a great treasure. She was convinced now it was all a lottery, and she resolved, therefore, to leave the affair in a great measure to chance.

On hearing from Dr. Turner, that Rosa was

young and pretty, an orphan, and homeless, she had made up her mind to take her, as she felt it would be a charity, and Lady Isabella was a very benevolent woman when she was not entirely engrossed by her own pains and sorrows. She was also a woman of imagination and had once been very romantic ; she tried now, however, to repress the interest the account of the fair young orphan had awakened.

“I have always been disappointed,” she thought to herself, “and why should I expect the present case to be an exception ; the girl’s circumstances are interesting, certainly, but how seldom does the mind correspond with the circumstances ! However, if she is amiable, I shall be kind to her. If she is only such another as Helen, with the advantages of a superior education, I shall be quite satisfied. It would be folly to hope for more.”

Hitherto, Lady Isabella had been much pleased with Rosa ; it seemed to her that she was getting more interested in her romantic face

and pleasant voice, and original, yet refined manners, than was altogether prudent. "I know she will disappoint me, and yet she certainly is not a common girl; she has read and understood, and quotes wonderfully *àpropos*."

It never struck Lady Isabella that Rosa's opinions could be original. She rarely supposed that any one could have felt and thought but herself. Still less could she have imagined the heroism with which so young a girl could have struggled through and risen above sufferings which had prostrated her for life.

Rosa in the meantime was wandering about the grounds and admiring the autumn flowers which decked Lady Isabella's garden with the most joyous colours. Seating herself on a rustic seat, overhung by the crimson leaves of a beautiful American creeping plant, she feasted her eyes on the dahlias, hollyhocks, verbenas, and roses, which shone brilliant amid their verdant frames of turf. Beyond through the trees it was

most beautiful to see the distant country, through which wound the shining, silvery river, rising slope above slope, rich with woods and fields adorned with sheaves of corn, till the blue distant hills bounded the view. And then, far off on a distant bend of the winding stream could be just discerned among the trees the grey towers of a ruined abbey, adding to the scene already so rich in material beauty, the more poetic and intellectual charm of association with times and manners long passed away.

Rosa had taken a book with her, but she could not read. It seemed to her that in spite of Lady Isabella's fretfulness, she should like her, and she should not be unhappy. Oh if Robert Clifden would only write her one line! She almost thought of writing to him again, but her pride forbade her. Had he never been her lover she might; but now they could be no more what they once had been.

Day after day Rosa got up in the morning with the hope that there might be a letter for her, and

day after day she was disappointed. Weeks passed, and hope deferred died at last. But the departure of expectation did not bring its wonted calm to her breast. On whatever subject she endeavoured to employ her mind, she found it wandering away in a speculation as to what Robert Clifden might be doing or thinking; or fancying some scene in which she should meet him again. At night she lay awake living over in memory the scenes and conversations of the past summer. Once or twice it struck her with some surprise, yet with equal satisfaction, that she rarely if ever recalled those days, not much less recent, which had been occupied by her intercourse with the Blakeney. Dim and unreal they had already become as things long distant—a mere episode in her life of which they seemed to form no part. She could hardly believe now either in the happiness or the anguish with which that time had been fraught. She saw Harold Blakeney as he really was, and wondered how he had ever appeared different. In

all that had ever passed between them, there seemed nothing substantial to look back upon. She could remember nothing noble, or wise, or good, he had ever said or done. No trait that she could recall of him mounted above the good-humoured and the commonplace and some sank below. She thanked heaven fervently for having preserved her from an union in which she must have felt herself the superior, and where to have felt it would have been more than ordinary unhappiness.

And as she thought of the happier time which had succeeded her illness, the peace which by degrees had stolen into her heart, bringing in its train energy and industry, and opening to her a new and more extended region of thought and hope and activity—as she thought of who had led her to the border of this enchanted land, who had accompanied and aided her in her pleasant toils, who had cheered and encouraged her in her difficulties, who had sought to elevate her mind above petty and selfish ills,

and in whom she had found self-denial, sympathy, and consolation such as even she scarcely dared to believe in the existence of—as she thought of all these things, they seemed to grow more substantial and more certain as they became more distant.

But it was bitter to her to think how she had repaid all this goodness, this true and noble love. The day which had preceded her departure from Riversthaite she could only remember with anguish, while Robert's face, the last time she had ever seen it, as he turned from her under the ash tree, haunted her alike waking and sleeping.

One day as these thoughts filled her mind with more than ordinary emotions of admiration and self-reproach, she suddenly rose from the seat on which she was sitting, and kneeling by her bed, made before Heaven a solemn vow for the sake of Robert Clifden. It seemed to her enthusiastic mind the only atonement she could make him, and though he would never

know it, it comforted herself. It was such a vow as in her wildest moments either of happiness or despair, Rosa had never thought of making for the sake of Harold Blakeney. Yet she was not in despair now.

A worthy love of that which is worthy of being beloved, even when ending in disappointment, never long weakens or prostrates, though it may sadden the mind. It is when we have loved an unworthy object, or with an unworthy love, that anguish is our portion, for then there can be no peace till the noxious affection which has rooted itself in the heart is torn out and cast forth for ever.

CHAPTER IV.

DAYS and weeks and months glided on at Highriggs in the same unvaried and luxurious monotony of existence, physical and mental. The variations in Lady Isabella's health and temper were the chief outward source of interest to Rosa and Helen.

The former had for some time, as the latter had at first prophesied, found it, if not "awful dull," yet tedious. But after some time she seemed to become accustomed to the dreamy,

luxurious existence in which life glided away like a silent river between banks, rich and flowery, yet ever unvaried in their scenery. It appeared almost like that state of unquestioning mesmeric quiescence, which to Easterns is the summit of bliss, but which is as far removed as possible from the excitement and fever in which the people of Western nations seem to place their ideas of happiness. The course of reading which she pursued with Lady Isabella helped to increase this feeling. It was dreamy, poetical, enervating, ever extolling the passive over the active existence; or if not extolling it, tending to induce it. She could no longer pursue here the vigorous studies she had commenced at Riversthaite; yet her mind did not stagnate if it did not actually make *progress*: like a flower, it opened to receive the dew and the sunshine.

In spite of her humours and whims, she had learned to love Lady Isabella; she found that Helen had given her a correct idea of the character of the latter, the groundwork of which

was good — and even great — but almost smothered with fancies, the result, Rosa sometimes suspected, of idleness and a sort of egotism which was selfishness only in its effects, for Lady Isabella was generous not only in the common sense of being liberal, but in the far higher sense of magnanimity and delicacy—qualities which any extraordinary occasion never failed to call forth. She then appeared a different being; Rosa often wondered how she had sunk into the state in which she had found her, and sometimes hoped in their moments of confidential chat, which occurred occasionally, that she would have imparted the cause or at least something which might have led her to guess it. But Lady Isabella was confidential only with regard to her sentiments and her sufferings—on these last she was at once minute in detail and eloquent in description; on her history she was silent and with regard to Rosa's she made few enquiries. She was satisfied, and even interested, to learn in a general way who her father was, how both her

parents were dead, and how she had not been happy under the roof of an aunt whither she had first gone after being left alone in the world. It appeared to Lady Isabella a touching, though a common tale, and she enquired no further. Either it was not her nature to look deep beneath the surface, or she was so much engrossed by her personal cares, mentally and bodily, that she had little either of time or attention to bestow in speculating about those of others.

She regarded Rosa as an interesting, sensible, and intelligent girl—a girl who was quite capable of understanding her ideas and sentiments on literary subjects—though of course she did not fully understand all her feelings. This nobody ever could do, for *her* feelings were *very* peculiar, and she did not expect ever to meet with any one who could fully appreciate them.

And so passed not only the days and weeks and months, but the years, too, slid away.

Thrice had Rosa seen the fair fields round Highriggs wrapped in snow, and thrice had she beheld the May sun shining on the young leaves and calling the spring flowers into bloom. She had been three years and a half with Lady Isabella Mac Whin. During all that period, she had only heard once of the Clifdens, and that was from Fanny Wills, about two years previous to the time to which I have now brought up my narrative. After she had been two or three months at Highriggs, it had struck her that she ought to write to Fanny, and the longer she meditated on the notion the more she became convinced it was a correct one. Fanny could not write to her, as she probably, nay, certainly, did not know her address. With considerable self-reproach for having delayed so long, and prefacing her letter with an apology, she wrote at last, avoiding all allusion to the cause of her leaving Riversthaite, and dwelling principally on her present home, its comfort and beauty, and the kindness of Lady Isabella. She thought even

if Fanny had felt a little pique at the rejection of her brother, her natural kindness of heart would make her glad to hear of her friend's well-being. She finished by entreating Fanny to forgive her long silence, and promising that if she would write soon, she would be a good correspondent for the future. When Rosa despatched this letter she was not without hopes that she might receive an early answer, and that it might contain news from Riversthaite.

But more than half a year passed and no answer came. Rosa was disappointed on more accounts than one. She had liked Fanny Wills, and after what she had written she felt her silence unkind. She thought Fanny might have understood how awkward it was for her to write at all. It was some weeks after she had given up all hope of hearing, that a letter from her former friend was at last delivered to her. She opened it with a thrill of pleasure, and a sensation of anxious expectation for which she could hardly account. It was a great dis-

appointment to Rosa to find the letter written in Fanny's very worst style. She had evidently not forgiven Rosa's rejection of her brother, and, perhaps, on that account seeing all she said and did with a jaundiced eye, she appeared to think that the latter had been boasting of the grandeur and gentility of Highriggs, and the estimation in which she was held there, and that it was necessary to *put her down* accordingly.

"I have heard of Lady Isabella Mac Whin," she wrote, "from the Coopers who know something of her brother's family. From all I have heard I am sure I pity you exceedingly being shut up in such a dismal place with a cross, hypochondriacal old maid. By the by, we were dining at the Coopers the other day. It was my brother's farewell visit before his marriage. He is going to marry a Miss Julia Grove, daughter of a Colonel Grove, whom he met at Harrogate last year. They are very highly connected. He has a cousin, a Sir Something Grove in Sussex. Julia is a most fascinating girl, and with a nice

little fortune. We are all much pleased. He could have made no marriage I should have liked half so well. He has taken a very pretty place on the other side of Ellerdale, Whitbeek House, perhaps you may remember it; it is being most handsomely furnished by a Liverpool upholsterer. My brother is determined that his bride shall have everything of the handsomest, he is so liberal and so devotedly attached. We had a very pleasant party at Viewlands. It was there that Louisa told me about that horrid Lady Isabella with whom you are immured. Mrs. Clifden and her nephew were there, but I had no chat with either of them. Robert Clifden is more silent and disagreeable than ever. I suppose you know he was chosen member for Marlepool at the election a few months ago. He is quite absorbed, they say, in politics—just the kind of cold-blooded man to make a politician. It seems that he is dreadfully disappointed that Louisa Cooper will not have him. She is going to be married, I have heard, to

a Scotch baronet. Mrs Clifden is more devoted to her nephew than ever. Mrs. Harold Blakeney is not, in my opinion, pretty; and they say she has a dreadful temper, though I understand very clever and managing. Harold is not nearly so handsome as he used to be, and is getting quite slovenly in his dress, and so fat and coarse. He is not at all worth your having worn the willow for so long. Though *I* think so little of Mrs. Harold Blakeney, she is, I believe, much admired by men. I heard Robert Clifden say he thought her pretty. You are right to make the best of Highriggs, but I shall be thankful to hear you have got another situation. I dare say, if you liked, I could obtain one for you through Miss Grove, who has a large and influential circle of relations and acquaintances. With love, believe me ever, dearest Rosa,

“Your most affectionate friend,

“FANNY MARIA WILLS.”

Rosa saw plainly from this letter that Fanny was far from being in charity with her, and she

doubted very much whether she should ever have received it at all, had it not been for the marriage of Mr. Wills, which his sister was evidently desirous to communicate and to magnify the advantages of. The letter vexed Rosa a little, but not in the way the writer intended. Rosa had liked, almost loved Fanny, and it pained her to find her so small-minded and almost spiteful. And yet Fanny was not so spiteful as she appeared. Had she really believed that Rosa loved her, and would have been so much hurt by what she had said, she would have written differently; but she attributed to the latter such a mind as those of the greater number of persons she had come in contact with. Fanny had been much hurt by Rosa's rejection of her brother. She had encouraged him to make the offer, in the full belief that she was doing a great kindness to her young friend, and confidently expected the gratitude of the latter for her good offices. Her refusal had therefore been a double blow to her. Af-

ter the receipt of the letter, as a *friend* Rosa gave up Fanny for evermore. If they ever met again she 'resolved that as far as possible it should be with intimacy and kindness, but she hoped no longer to be understood by Fanny Wills. She replied to Fanny's letter in a few weeks, but she did not hear from her again.

The part of Fanny's letter which had really annoyed Rosa the most, was that concerning Robert Clifden. Though she did not give the report of his attachment to Miss Cooper a single instant's credit, she fancied from what Fanny had said, that he must be unwell, or unhappy, or perhaps he really was engrossed by politics. Perhaps he had returned to his old opinions, and once more despised individual interests and individual affections. It seemed not unlikely. Perhaps even already he rejoiced that Rosa had not accepted him. Possibly he looked back upon the period of their constant companionship as a season of folly. Had he not

done so, he would have written. Anger alone could not have kept him silent all this time. And yet she could not believe, when she recalled all the past, that he could so easily have resigned her. The fact, however, remained to answer for itself. He *had* resigned her, and the certainty of this was inconceivably bitter.

That he was entirely engrossed by public life, an incident which occurred not long after the receipt of Miss Wills' letter, tended to convince her.

A morning paper was taken regularly at Highriggs, but rather it would seem for the benefit of the servants' hall, than for that of Lady Isabella and her companion, neither of whom were politicians, nor felt even much interest in the births, deaths, and marriages. It lay, however, all the morning of its arrival upon the table of Lady Isabella's boudoir, and when Rosa sat there waiting for the completion of her Ladyship's toilet, she occasionally took it up for a few minutes. She had done so one morn-

ing in a careless sort of way, and was laying it down again, when her eye was attracted to the report of the parliamentary debates, by seeing the words,

“Mr. Clifden, member for Marlepool next rose and addressed the House.” With trembling hands, and eager, dazzled eyes, Rosa read on.

The speech was rather a long one. It was upon the Church, and on the union of the State with the Church. What side in this much vexed question Mr. Clifden espoused, or what view he took, it is not my intention to explain. It is one on which many good men have differed. Whatever his learning might have been, however, Robert Clifden's view was not that exactly of any party. It was characterised by some originality of idea, and still more of illustration and argument.

Perfectly master of the subject, he began by giving a clear, concise, dispassionate, and rapid resumé of its past history, passing on to a vig-

orous and graphic picture of its present position, duties, wants, and abuses, and winding up by an appeal to the understandings and consciences of his listeners—an appeal which, sensible and manly in the beginning, rose from the ardent earnestness and sincerity of the speaker, into eloquence in the end.

He sat down amid the plaudits of the House.

It was, the leader of the paper said, the most successful and impressive maiden speech that had been made for years ; and though in some respects romantic and juvenile (newspapers always say so of the efforts of young persons) it was full of the promise of sterling abilities and sound judgment. The hon. member for Marlepool had already obtained the ear of the House.

Rosa was so much absorbed in the perusal of the paper that she did not hear Lady Isabella call to her twice, and she was only aware that her presence was required when the latter made her appearance in the doorway.

"You are there, Miss Grey! I fancied you were not as I have called you twice."

"I beg pardon," cried Rosa, starting from her reverie, "I did not hear you."

"You must be much engrossed by your studies; what can you possibly have found to interest you so much in the newspaper?"

"Oh, nothing!" cried Rosa, from some impulse she hardly understood. Then, conscious she had not quite spoken the truth, she added, "Only a speech in Tuesday night's debate."

"Come, then, and read it to me."

"I thought your ladyship did not care for Parliamentary debates."

"And I thought you did not; and I fancied the exceptional case which had interested you, might interest me too. We can try, at any rate."

And so Rosa found herself obliged to read aloud Robert Clifden's speech to Lady Isabella. At first her voice faltered a little, but by degrees it became steady and clear; from long practice,

and possessed of naturally well-modulated tones, Rosa read well. As she proceeded she became so identified with the speaker and so imbued with his sentiments, that losing the self-consciousness with which she had commenced, she read with the real eloquence of one who feels every word he utters. One part of the speech she had more especially admired. It was that in which Robert enforced the doctrine, that the Church ought to interest herself even in all secular matters of a beneficial nature, more especially in all movements of the intellect of the age, in order that they might be Christianised and elevated. If the Church, he said, did not place herself in the van of civilization, she woefully neglected her high commission, and in consequence, what might have become a great engine for the advancement of truth and goodness, was perverted into an instrument of evil—a very tool of the devil. He then wound up with a sketch of what many of the popular movements of the day might become if they

were governed and inspired by the pure, self-sacrificing, ever hopeful and valiant spirit of the Gospel.

Rosa looked up when she had finished reading, and saw that Lady Isabella's eyes were full of tears.

"I admire that," she said, "it is noble; by whom did you say it was spoken?"

And Rosa read from the paper:—"ROBERT CONWAY CLIFDEN, Esq., M.P. for Marlepool."

Lady Isabella started from her reclining attitude, her pale face flushed, and she exclaimed,

"Robert Conway! Ah! Conway, something else you said?"

"Conway Clifden."

"Ah!" said Lady Isabella again with her old gentleness of manner; then adding, as if in explanation, "Long ago I knew a Mr. Robert Conway, and he, too, was member for Marlepool."

"It must have been Mr. Clifden's father," said Rosa; "I believe he was member for Marlepool."

"You believe ! What do you know, child, of Mr. Conway ?"

"Mr. Robert Clifden is nephew to Mrs. Clifden, my uncle's widow, with whom I staid before I came here. She and her sister were co-heiresses and their respective husbands took their names."

"Ah !" said Lady Isabella again, and fell into a reverie. Rousing herself, however, she asked, Rosa almost fancied with a little embarrassment, though that *she* should be embarrassed seemed impossible :

"Did you ever see this young Mr. Conway — Clifden, I mean ?"

"Oh yes !" added Rosa, and it was now her turn to be a little embarrassed ; "I knew him intimately."

"Indeed ! What sort of young man was he ? Was he handsome ? Was he clever and interesting ?"

"He was very clever," Rosa answered energetically, and was on the point of adding that he was very interesting, and certainly good-

looking, when she remembered that ere she had known him so well, she had not thought him either the one or the other.

“His speech shows that he is clever, and good too, except that people are not always the same in action as in words.”

“Oh ! but Robert Clifden is quite the same. He is the most sincere person I ever knew.”

“Is he indeed ? Describe him to me, my dear. I feel interested to hear about him. I knew his father, (yes, he must be Robert Conway’s son) long ago, and I am much pleased with his speech.”

It was rather a difficult undertaking for Rosa to describe Robert Clifden, but she tried :

“He is little and pale and delicate looking ; but very refined and gentlemanly, both in manners and appearance.”

“Is he impetuous and enthusiastic ? ” enquired Lady Isabella.

“Not in the least,” Rosa answered, and then remembering her last interview with him, she

qualified her opinion by adding, "At any rate he does not look so in a usual way."

"Oh!" said her Ladyship in a tone rather of disappointment, "I cannot bear cold-blooded people."

"Oh but!" cried Rosa warmly, "he is not in the least cold-blooded. He has the warmest and truest heart—he is the least selfish person in the world."

"His father, at least when I knew him, was very enthusiastic and his manners were very fascinating. He was very handsome."

Interested in her turn, Rosa enquired:

"Were you intimately acquainted with him?"

"Yes, but it is long ago."

"It must be very long ago, for I believe he died soon after Mr. Robert Clifden was born."

"Yes, I think I heard he died of a fever. I have heard nothing of the family since. Is—is his wife, Mr. Clifden's mother, alive?"

"No. She too died when he was a child, but his aunt, Mrs. Clifden, dotes passionately on him."

"What sort of a woman is she?"

"Mrs. Clifden? I did not like her much, I thought her haughty and unfeeling to most people, but she was very fond of her nephew."

"Oh, she is your aunt too! the lady who domineered over you. I wonder if her sister was like her. Could Robert Conway have married so soulless and unfeeling a woman?"

Again Lady Isabella fell into a reverie. She was thoughtful and rather melancholy all the afternoon; but much less fidgetty than usual.

The whole evening she did not once mention either the strange feelings in her head or her side, and never even referred to the peculiar constitution of her mind. She appeared to have something to think of. Rosa remarked that when she had nothing to occupy her attention, her sufferings were always greatest. She had been much interested herself, by the occurrences of the morning not only by Robert Clifden's speech and the light it threw upon his present mode of life, but by Lady Isabella's conversation

about him and his father. She longed to know how they had been acquainted and how intimate they had been, for something in Lady Isabella's manner had made her suspect they had been more than common acquaintances. How strange it would be if Lady Isabella's fate should have any point of meeting with that of Robert Clifden!

She had felt a little nervous that Lady Isabella might have suspected that he had been the cause of her leaving Riversthrwaite; but her Ladyship was the last person in the world to suspect anything of the sort. She was always too much self-engrossed to be speculating on the motives and destiny of others; she was, moreover, prepossessed with the notion, partly from Rosa's youth, and partly from her manner, that she had never had a love affair.

Lady Isabella shrank from all vulgar talk and jesting about love and lovers; to her, love was a high and sacred thing. Like all persons, too, of refined and sensitive minds, she had a deep reverence for the innocence and purity of youth.

From this time forward, however, whatever might be the reason, Lady Isabella was as much interested to know who had spoken in Parliament as Rosa—outwardly, indeed, she seemed more interested. Twice or thrice again during the session, Robert Clifden spoke, and always with vigour and effect. It was wonderful, the interest Lady Isabella took in him. It seemed almost an object in life ; it really appeared to do her good.

But when Parliament opened the following winter, Lady Isabella and her young companion looked in vain for a speech from Robert Clifden. The whole session passed and his name was not once mentioned in the papers. The following year, a tiny paragraph announced that a new writ had been moved for Marlepool vice Robert Clifden, Esq., who had resigned his seat. From that time his name was mentioned no more.

For some months Lady Isabella was much occupied in wondering what could have become of Mr. Clifden, or young Mr. Conway, as she geuerally called him ; but in the course of time

the subject seemed to drop out of her mind. Not so was it with Rosa: month after month as it passed by only increased her wonder and anxiety. In the utter absence of all outward demands upon her interest, save Lady Isabella's variations of spirits, attention to which had now become mechanical, speculations upon this subject at last came almost to occupy her mind exclusively. Rosa's was one of those minds tenacious of impressions and vivid in imagination, to which distance and absence do not make the same difference that they do on weaker memories and less lively powers of realising the invisible.

During the fourth summer of her abode at Highriggs, perhaps from some physical derangement, perhaps from the protracted unhealthy monotony of her life, these questionings and interests began to assume a morbid form.

Rosa almost dreaded that she was about to fall into the nervous state which had overwhelmed poor Lady Isabella's whole life. Valiantly she strove against it earnestly she tried to

represent to herself how well off she was, how kindly she was treated. It would not do. Her thoughts, her feelings oppressed her; she felt that it would have been a relief to communicate them, but there was no one but Lady Isabella, and Rosa shrank from intruding her nervousness on one who had already so heavy a burden of her own to bear.

So oppressed, however, she became with the aimlessness and monotony of her life, so haunted by the recollections to which I have alluded, that it seemed to her that her old life of humiliation at Riversthaite, even the agony she had endured at the time of the defection of Harold Blakeney, was better than the stifling, oppressive existence she now led.

Her spirits so unusually depressed, she became pale and thin. It was some time ere Lady Isabella remarked any change, but at last it struck her. One afternoon, she called Rosa to her and bade her sit down on the sofa beside her.

Rosa did as she was desired, and Lady Isabella scrutinised her earnestly.

"You are not very well," she said. "You require a change ; you have been here, now, for several years, and have never been further than Birkenside. It is not good for a young healthy girl, and is what when I was your age, or at least before I had learnt that one place had not more pleasure to give than another, I should not have liked at all. You are a very kind and very amiable girl, Rosa, and I have been happier with you than with any companion I ever had. I feel, my dear child, that I owe you something ; you shall have a month or two's leave of absence if there is any one you should like to visit."

"Thank you, Lady Isabella, but I know no one but the Turners, and I should much rather stay with you. I am not really ill."

"You are perhaps not aware of it, my dear, but you are becoming quite moped. Your whole youth and beauty must not be consumed in attendance upon an invalid old woman. I should not like to see you, Miss Grey, the counterpart of myself, and that is what you may become if

you have no other society. You have no friends you say to go to, my poor child. I have been thinking of something, and if I keep free from spasms and fainting fits during the summer, and the season is fine, I shall take you somewhere in the autumn myself. It is ten long years now since I left Highriggs, and the last time I was from home, I said I would never go again. But I am a little better now. We must think of some nice watering-place, not too far off, where we can get quiet lodgings. Shall you not like it, my dear ? ”

“ Oh very much ! How kind you are ! ” and Rosa’s eyes filled with tears.

Lady Isabella drew the girl towards her and kissed her affectionately. It was the first time she had ever done so. Rosa’s tears flowed fast.

“ Why do you weep so, my dear ? ”

“ Because you are so kind—so very kind.”

“ Kind ! Have you missed kindness, my love, since you came here ? ”

“ Oh ! no, madam ! quite the reverse. I have

often wished to tell you how grateful I was—and to think of your doing this for me ! ”

“ Why not if I am able ? ” I must not have the roses wither in that beautiful face, while you are with me—which I hope may be till you are married.”

“ I shall never be married.”

“ So all young girls say till they are.”

“ But every body is not married.” Lady Isabella sighed.

“ No—I am not, and it is better so, I know now ; but not for you, my dear. You have not my constitution, my peculiar sufferings and my peculiar feelings. You will be much more easily made happy than I should have been. You are just the pretty, sweet-tempered, intelligent sort of girl, to make a sensible man happy and proud in your love. I shall grieve to part with you, my child, but I hope you *may* marry—you *will* marry.”

“ I am not talking merely like a young girl, Lady Isabella, when I say I shall never marry.

I made a solemn vow three years ago that I never would, and my mind is the same now that it was then."

Lady Isabella looked at her in some surprise. Her face was resolute and grave. She perceived in Rosa at that moment something different from, something higher than the mere amiable, intelligent young girl she had hitherto imagined her.

"Is your vow without reservation?" she asked. Rosa coloured, and was silent. It was a question she had never asked herself and which in truth she could not have answered.

"My poor, poor girl! Have you, too, loved in vain?"

"I did not love in vain. I did not know either that I loved, or was beloved. I rejected him in a moment of anger and resentment. He is so good and noble. I have resolved to live all my life single, for his sake. Having been once honoured by his affection, I could marry no one inferior to him, and I am resolved

with God's help to live in the way he would approve."

"And what way is that my child?"

"In making the best of my lot—in learning, working, loving—trusting my destiny in this life, as well as my state in a better, to the care of Him, who has created and redeemed me, and who, I hope, weak, and wayward, and full of worldliness, as my heart yet is, may make me holy through suffering or through happiness as may seem good to him."

"My child!" cried Lady Isabella starting upright upon her couch, with her face unusually animated, and her eyes full of tears, "You have a noble and a holy heart."

"Do not say so, dear Lady Isabella, for you make me feel an impostor and a hypocrite. I am not good, I am not noble. My heart is full of worldly wishes—faithless, anxious, impatient. Oh! I only tell you what I *wish*, what I try a little, but not half so much as I ought, to be."

Lady Isabella made no other answer than by

again drawing Rosa to her and kissing her. She wished that the latter would have made a full confession of all her feelings, but she was too fastidiously delicate to ask her to do so, while Rosa feeling the difference in their age and position did not like to do so unasked. A silence of some minutes succeeded, which was at length broken by the elder lady :

“At all events we must go from home in August, Rosa, and my dear we must yet be more to one another than we have ever been.”

Rosa only answered by kissing her friend's hand. The latter embraced her warmly and then fell into a reverie.

CHAPTER IV.

FROM the day on which Lady Isabella resolved to leave home for the sake of a little change for the health of her young companion, her own seemed to improve. Fits of languor and irritability and melancholy, in which for the time it seemed impossible to go, she of course had, but they were less frequent and of shorter duration, more especially as the period drew near. It would benefit Rosa so much she thought, and the novel

interest of having an object in existence, of thinking of another instead of herself, did Lady Isabella good without her being aware of it. She had made one step towards that happy unconsciousness, which is the sure sign of physical and mental health.

The prospect, however, had not been of quite the same benefit to Rosa. Out of gratitude, however, to her patroness, she tried to be happy and interested, and to hope the change would do her good. But whenever she was alone, and that was often, whether she was reading, working, or writing, one image ever glided before her mental vision, one subject of speculation occupied her thoughts even to exhaustion. At times she felt as if she could not bear it—as if any certainty, even that of his death, would be more endurable. And yet the vague thought that he might indeed be no more, was too frightful a calamity even to be contemplated. And then in her restlessness, and weariness, and anxiety, poor Rosa felt that she could only pray

—pray for faith, and strength, and patience—pray amid all the doubt which surrounded her, and which in its prolongation, she felt to be harder to bear even than disappointment and sorrow—for that earnest reliance on Him, who behind the most impenetrable clouds is as assuredly guiding our destiny, as when we *seem* to behold clearly the pleasant path stretching out before us. And thus, though worn, fainting, weak, she never gave way altogether. The battle was hard, but she was not unassisted, and the harder it became, the more closely she clung to Him who is the strength of all those who put their trust in Him.

After innumerable consultations, hesitations, changes of plan, balancing of advantages and disadvantages, Peversley, a small, quiet watering place, situated on the southern side of the border, amid interesting and romantic scenery, was fixed on as the place of their destination. At first, Lady Isabella only intended to take one female servant with her—Helen of course. Then

it struck her Ladyship that she must have a cook, for she was convinced that lodging-house cooking must be unendurable. Other people might be able to bear it, but from her peculiar constitution she knew she never could. If she were to depend on lodging-house cooking, she knew she should be starved to death. To take her own cook with her was, however, quite impossible, as uniting the office of housekeeper with that of cook, she was the only responsible person she could leave behind in charge of Highriggs. Lady Isabella was in one of her most irritable humours when this difficulty suggested itself. She could think of no way of meeting it. To engage a stranger was impossible. She could not bear strangers, and a person she did not know, would most likely turn out an incumbrance instead of a help.

It was always the way with her. It was a peculiarity in her life, that there was always some obstacle in the accomplishment of anything she wished to do. She feared she should not

be able to go to Perversley. She must give up her lodgings. It would be better to do that than be poisoned. She fancied it would be impossible to get a suitable person.

Poor Helen, who was the most eager of the party to go, looked quite in dismay at this turn of affairs. "She had no doubt if her Ladyship would allow Miss Grey and herself to make enquiries, they could procure a respectable person and a good cook. Very likely there might be one to be had at Birken-side."

Rosa was now struck by an idea, and suggested Nelly Jemmison.

Lady Isabella appeared inclined at first to look coldly on any suggestion, and to adhere to her notion that nothing ever went right with her. But on hearing Rosa's account of Nelly, in answer to her own, at first rather crossly put questions, she got quite interested, recovered her spirits and became eager to engage Rosa's strong-minded and faithful friend.

"I like people with some character," said

Lady Isabella. "Nelly, from your description would be too ungentle for me to endure about my person, but if she is as you say so clean, so honest, so full of resource, and so attached to you, she is the very person we need. We are none of us very strong, and we shall be the better for some one to take care of us. Shall you be able, my dear, to go to Birkenside to-morrow to engage Nelly? I hope she may come. Remember, Rosa, money is no object to me."

Rosa made a point of being able to go to Birkenside. Helen was delighted, and Lady Isabella in unusually good health and spirits all the rest of the day. The next morning early, Rosa set out for Birkenside. She found Nelly at home at her washing-tub. They had not met for some time, and after the first joyful exclamations on seeing her once more at Birkenside, Nelly changed her tone:

"Wae's me, hinny! but ye are looking very ill on't. What ails ye, my lamb? Ye're no weel."

Rosa confessed she was not, told Nelly that Lady Isabella was kindly going to take her away for change of air, and finally communicated to her the reason of her present visit. Nelly was evidently pleased and flattered.

"I dinna like gaun frae hame, hinny, but I wad gang ony gate wi' you. Her Laddyship will pay me something forbye my expenses, no but what to do you gude, I wad gang for naething, but it's only just. I maun shut up my hoos and gie up my wark."

"Lady Isabella will pay you handsomely. We are to be away six weeks, and she desired me to say she would give you ten pounds."

"Ten pund!" exclaimed Nelly in a tone of awe and amazement at the magnitude of the sum, "Near a haill year's wages!" and her hard features relaxed, and her dark eyes brightened with eager delight. Then, after a pause, she added in a more subdued tone; "It's ower muckle, hinny. I dinna ken that I'm free to tak as muckle. May be her Laddyship kens nae

mair about money than ye do yersel. Na, na, my dear, I maun be honest," she added almost in a tone of regret at the necessity.

"You may honestly accept the ten pounds, Nelly. Lady Isabella is quite aware of the value of the sum she offers you; but she is very wealthy, and would, I know, consider double as much well-spent in securing a trustworthy and competent person. She said so to me, and she knows she can get a person for much less."

Nelly's face brightened again at the idea of acquiring so large a sum in a perfectly conscientious manner. She was flattered, too, at the estimation in which she was held.

"Oh, weel then, if she kens she could get a servant for less, an' it's naething to her, and for a puir body like me a great matter, I'll say nae mair, Miss Rosa, but mind, hinny, to pleasure you, I wad ha' comed for naething."

About a fortnight after the completion of this arrangement, Lady Isabella Mac Whin and her attendants set out for Peversley. Fortu-

nately it was a fine day. Lady Isabella was in wonderfully genial spirits. She seemed quite to have forgotten the fatigue she knew she was to endure, and the heat, which she had been certain the night before would kill her. Nelly had arrived at Highriggs the previous evening, and had had a private conversation with her new mistress which had much interested the latter, not only by the originality of her new domestic, but by the details she gave of the Greys. Lady Isabella's kindness to Rosa, had caused Nelly to conceive a favourable opinion of the former. When people were in the main kind-hearted and just, Nelly could pardon minor failings. Nelly was not in the least put about, but extremely amused by the whims and peculiarities of her new mistress. In these moods she seemed to regard Lady Isabella as a wayward, but loveable child, who must be humoured, indulged, and protected. In time, she came to understand the management of her mistress better than Helen and Rosa, who were too submissive, too sympathising, and too sensitive.

"Hout, bairns!" Nelly would say to these two, "leave her to me, and she'll be laughing 'stead o' greeting, in five minutes time."

And this promise Nelly generally contrived to keep. She had a sort of quaint, humourous, authoritative, yet very respectful way of treating Lady Isabella, and the latter was amused, and to a certain extent kept in order by it. Like all sensitive people she had a horror of ridicule, and, how she could not tell, since Nelly began occasionally to attend her, a suspicion of the absurdity of some of her grievances had dawned upon her. Yet Nelly was so substantially kind, and ready to oblige, so genuine, so shrewd, that she was a great comfort as well as a mine of entertainment to her mistress.

In the meantime, Nelly herself had never in her life been so happy before.

It was Rosa who had first taught her that she could be liked, and what had happened once, Nelly logically argued, might happen again. She was therefore more easily induced to believe

in the regard of her new mistress than she had been in former days in that of the gentle Mrs. Grey. Rosa and Helen, too, liked her, and all three frequently looked up to her strong shrewd mind, and longer experience of the world, for guidance in the practical difficulties of their present expedition. Thus while Nelly revered both Lady Isabella and Rosa as far her superiors in wisdom, in learning, and in goodness ; in the common affairs of life, she regarded them as mere children, whom she must protect from imposition and restrain from imprudence. Though long past the prime of life, there was at Nelly's heart a softness, and in her spirit a lightness unknown to her earlier days. The spring had been chilly and blighting, but the genial after-summer called forth, even from the apparently hard and unpromising soil of Nelly Jemmison's nature, a few fair blossoms.

Peversley, as I have said, was in the north of England. It was situated in a hilly though by no means mountainous district. It was a

small and pretty village, consisting for the most part of neat, whitewashed houses, with very green doors and shutters, scattered over a pleasant slope, and interspersed with little gardens and fresh foliage. At the foot of this slope flowed a bright little rivulet, and on the further side, pleasant undulating meadows were bounded by woods and wood-crowned heights, amid which were pleasant wild dells, a baronial castle, and a ruined abbey,—the lions of Peversley, and the resort of pic-nic parties among its visitors.

There was one, and but one, hotel at Peversley, on the table d' hôte system, and from it were procurable carriages, horses, and Bath-chairs. Stands of donkeys also there were, for all the world rode on donkeys at Peversley. Besides these advantages, there were also a news room and a pump room. Still, Peversley was not a gay place, and was much more frequented by invalids than by pleasure-seekers.

Lady Isabella of course did not reside in the hotel. She had a pleasant lodging near the foot

of the declivity mentioned above. The house stood in a garden, near a little wooden foot bridge over the rivulet, and commanded a view over the meadows and of a romantic opening in the hills. The house in which Lady Isabella lodged was the most important private dwelling in the place save one. This was an almost mansion-like edifice situated on the opposite side of the stream, possessing the dignity of a wide iron gate, a carriage sweep, and a lawn in front, and rejoicing in the name of Victoria House. Here Lady Isabella had wished to engage lodgings, but they were already taken by a lady invalid, who was expected to bring with her a whole retinue of attendants. She had not, however, yet arrived, at least, so Helen said, and she soon became the authority for all the news of Perversley. It was, indeed, quite wonderful the faculty Helen possessed for collecting news: they had not been a week in their lodgings before she was *au fait* of the whole gossip of the place, much to the amusement of her mistress and Rosa, and a little to

the indignation of Nelly. But Helen was of so amiable a disposition, and had so long been debarred all intercourse with her kind, with the exception of the inmates of Highriggs, that it was small wonder she rushed with eagerness into every form of social enjoyment within her reach. All the flirtations going on at Perversley among the water-drinking beaux and belles, upstairs as well as down, were at her fingers' ends.

Perversley, for so small a place, was unusually gay this year.

It was a fine season, and a new railway branch had been opened, which had brought a great influx of visitors. Altogether, it had never before been so fashionable; Lady Isabella and Rosa were both sorry for this, but Nelly rejoiced.

"It will do them baith a hantel o'gude," she remarked to Helen; "I only wish they kenned a wheen folk."

"And maybe, Miss Grey would get a beau," said Helen.

"Silly tawpie!" ejaculated Nelly indignantly, "the lassie's head aye runnin' on that trash. For a' as young an' as bonny as Miss Rosa is, far bonnier by you, Ealen, my woman, she's no taen up wi' ony sic nonsense. Folk come to nae gude that are aye thinking o'beaux and sic like," said Nelly, who never in her whole life having had a beau herself, was consequently inclined to be severe on those who had, and to suspect they could hardly come by them by fair and sensible means.

"I mean no ill, Nelly," Helen answered, apologetically, and with some amusement; "but everybody must have a beau before they are married, and I don't see why Miss Grey should not be married."

"I wish she was, puir thing! She has nae friends, no but what some folk get on weel aneuch their lane, but no Miss Rosa. But that's a vera different thing frae you, Ealen, and tak my word, if ye gang haverin' and laughin' wi' ilka glaikit man ye meet, nae gude wull come o't."

Helen, quite unconvinced and not able to see the difference, made, however, no answer, but smiled good-naturedly, and then to turn the conversation, remarked—

“The family have arrived at last, at Victoria House.”

“Weel, an’ what’s that to you, hinny?” said Nelly, rather sharply.

“They came in a carriage and four—the splendideest carriage! Far handsomer than ours. But oh! Nelly, if you had seen the lady it belongs to, that way palsied, both her legs so shrunk up, her head shaking so, and her face all twisted. There was a gentleman, too, but I only saw his back; they say he is blind. They have two men-servants with them, and three maids. They say they are terrible rich: I am not certain whether the poor blind gentleman is the lady’s husband or her son, but I fancy her son, as they said it was a *lady* had taken the house.”

“Puir cratures!” said Nelly, “a mither and a son baith that sair afflicted.”

"Eh, Nelly! what does their money do for them?"

"It does a dale for them, Ealen, to my mind. Where wad they ha' been if they had had nane? Deedin in a puir-house, aiblins! or maybe, begging frae door to door. Money will no do a'thing, my lass, if ye mean that, but folk are aye better off wi't nor they wad ha' been wantin' it. It's no their money, I trow, makes them blind and palsied; I aye wonder to hear folk speaking sic havers."

"I was not thinking of all that, Nelly," said good-natured Helen, "but I see it's very true."

"Weel then, my lass! the niest time, think afore ye speak."

"I was only meaning that some folk that have no money are happier than those that are rich. I have sometimes thought my lady would have been quite as happy if she had not been so rich."

Privately this was Nelly's opinion too, but as it was against her own argument at present, she made no response, but permitted the conversa-

tion to drop. The silence was broken by the arrival of the postman, who brought not only the daily newspaper forwarded from Highriggs, but a letter for Lady Isabella. Now the arrival of a letter was a very rare occurrence in Lady Isabella's establishment. Three or four times a year her Ladyship heard from her brother, and Rosa about as often from the Miss Turners. Helen herself occasionally heard from her sisters, who were at service in Edinburgh, and when she saw the letter she fancied at first it must be for her, as her mistress had heard from Lord Peatmuir very lately. But no, it was for Lady Isabella herself, and sealed with the well-known Peatmuir crest, and addressed in the Earl's own handwriting.

"How very odd," said Helen; "it's only a fortnight since my Lady heard from his Lordship. What can he be writing about?"

"What is it to you, my lass, if it were only yesterday?" said Nelly.

Helen, however, remarked that when Lady

Isabella received the letter she seemed quite as much surprised as herself, and wondered what her brother could be writing about. In some curiosity Helen left the room—curiosity which she durst not relieve even by communicating it to Nelly.

As soon as Lady Isabella had finished reading her letter, she exclaimed to Rosa, almost in excitement,

“It is to announce the marriage of my nephew, Lord Heatherbrae. It seems the bride elect is a great beauty and a great heiress. I wish them all happiness. I have heard,” she continued, “that Heatherbrae is very extravagant. When I last saw him he was a very thoughtless, warm-hearted, generous boy—at least he seemed so. I trust this is not merely a mercenary marriage. But my brother says, that besides being wealthy, Miss Cooper is young and beautiful.”

“Miss Cooper!” cried Rosa; “not Louisa Cooper—not Miss Cooper of Viewlands!”

"The same," said Lady Isabella in some surprise; "but what do you know of her, my dear?"

"Very little indeed; but she was a near neighbour of ours at Riversthaite, and I have frequently seen her."

"And what sort of a girl is she?" Lady Isabella asked with interest.

"Very pretty indeed, and very rich."

"And what more?"

"They say she is very accomplished."

"Is she sensible?—is she amiable?"

"I did not know her very intimately. She is some years older than I am, and I dare say she then considered me a child."

Lady Isabella looked grave and thoughtful. She saw that Rosa did not like Miss Cooper, but with characteristic politeness she asked no more, merely remarking—

"If Heatherbrae's wife has not sense and firmness, if she cannot both attach and influence her husband, whatever may be her fortune

it will soon be spent. Heatherbrae is, from all I have heard, easily won by kindness ; and he is clever they say, but lavish, imprudent, idle, and careless of the morrow. I am anxious, Rosa, about my brother's son. I shall not be comfortable till I have seen his wife that I may judge for myself."

"Seen her ! But have you any prospect of seeing her ? "

"Yes. Did I not tell you ? They are coming to the hotel here for a couple of days on purpose to see me, that I may be acquainted with my new niece."

Rosa made no answer, but the prospect of seeing Louisa Cooper once more made a thousand thoughts rush upon her mind. She should hear of Riversthwaite ! she should hear of Robert !

This certainty nearly took away her breath, and absorbed every other idea. After a pause of some duration, Lady Isabella exclaimed in a tone of satisfaction, and as if the notion had just struck her :

“By the by, Miss Cooper, Lady Heatherbrae, may be able to tell us something of our old hero, Robert Conway—your old acquaintance, Rosa. Should not you like to hear of him?”

As Lady Isabella asked the question she observed Rosa narrowly. She saw her bosom heave and her eye shine eagerly.

“My poor girl!” she said in a low, tender voice, “perhaps it might be better you did not hear of him.”

“Oh no!” cried Rosa. “Why do you say so?”

“Nay, my child,” said Lady Isabella, sitting down beside her companion and drawing the latter affectionately towards her, “I know nothing, therefore I may be wrong. I only see that you love this Robert Conway—Clifden.”

“I love him, dear Lady Isabella, as my dearest friend, my best benefactor, as the kindest, truest, noblest of human beings. A brother could not be dearer, but I do not love him as you think.”

"Lady Isabella regarded her in some surprise.

"Rosa, I know you would not speak as you do, if you did not think what you say. But, my dear, you told me once you had made a vow not to marry. Was not this for the sake of Mr. Conway? But do not think you are forced to answer," she added hastily.

"It was for the sake of Robert Clifden; but it was because he had loved me so undeservedly, so unselfishly, because he was so noble, and I was so ungrateful, cruel, and unworthy. It seemed the only way I could make up to him, the only thing I could do for his sake, and though he will never know it, it has been a comfort to my own heart ever since."

"My child, I don't believe you were ever cruel and ungrateful."

"Not in my heart; but in a fit of wounded pride, in a fit of angry temper, I acted cruelly and ungratefully. He had thought only of me and I thought only of myself."

"This is a very sad affair. Is it this, Rosa,

which weighs on your spirits and makes you ill ? and why are you worse now than when you came to me first."

"I am not well ; and I think my health has affected my spirits. And then I have not heard of him—if he should be—should be—he is delicate. But I have been better since I came to Perversley."

"My poor, poor Rosa ! I understand it all, my child."

"But I am better," cried Rosa eagerly, "it is a trial of my faith—I know it, and please God I will not sink under it. You are so kind to me, dear Lady Isabella—I have been sent a friend in my need. I will think of you. I will not selfishly brood over my own anxieties. I am so much better. We shall hear from Louisa Cooper, and in the meantime you will see—you will see, with God's help, how much better I shall be. The change of air and the water are doing me good. I am going to translate such a pretty song from the German for you ; and there is a poor woman down at the other end of the vil-

lage I am going to visit this afternoon. It will pass the time till your nephew comes. I dare say it will seem short. When are they to be here?"

"Next week," returned Lady Isabella, looking at Rosa with an aspect, in which admiration was mingled with affection, then falling into deep, it would almost seem melancholy thought. But all the afternoon she was singularly well—not an ache, not a *peculiar* feeling of any kind. And this improvement lasted beyond the day. Of course Lady Isabella often spoke in an irritable tone, and was as impatient as ever of being kept waiting. But she went out to drive daily, and sometimes even to walk. She accompanied Rosa in her visits to one or two poor persons, whom the latter had discovered, and announced her intention, of visiting the poor personally when she returned home. She had always given largely in charity.

She did not refer again to the topic on which she and Rosa had spoken on the day she had

received her brother's letter ; but she seconded all the efforts of the latter to employ herself, and to take an interest in all that was passing around. A new theory of life and duty had dawned upon Lady Isabella.

She even began to ask herself, if her whole life had not been one great mistake, if after all it might not be nobler to rise above a great sorrow, go forth into the world and learn there a life of usefulness and kindness, than nurse it and sit apart with it till the whole universe of God was obscured by the little black speck of individual personality, magnified into a mighty shadow by the eye which had contemplated it, till it could see nothing else.

In the meantime Rosa adhered to her resolution. Whatever inward anxiety or suspense she might be suffering, outwardly she gave no sign. Mind and body were alike stronger than they had been at Highriggs.

One afternoon when she and Lady Isabella were taking a walk, they were accosted by a

beggar woman, who was crouched under the hedge by the road side, and as they approached rose to meet them. She was indeed a miserable object, dirty, ragged, diseased and drunken. Not that she was at that moment very much intoxicated, but the wasted body, the bloated countenance, the glazed eye, the bold, reckless mien, all betrayed the victim of habitual intemperance. It was in a tone almost fierce that she demanded, rather than begged, charity.

The gentle, fastidious, delicate Lady Isabella recoiled from her almost in terror.

“Give her a trifle, Rosa.”

“She will drink it,” whispered the latter, doubtful of the propriety of encouraging vice, yet feeling also that wretchedness so extreme ought in some way to be relieved. Low as Rosa’s whisper was, the woman heard it, and broke forth in a torrent of abusive language.

Lady Isabella, quite frightened, clung to Rosa as if for protection, but the latter stood her ground bravely.

"It's a shame to ye," said the woman, who was Scottish by her speech. "Ye lie in yer braw, saft, beds, and I havena a roof ower my heid. I am deeing wi' pain and hunger, and ye leave me to lie doon in the ditch, and gang back to yer silken sofas and yer dainty suppers, and ye speak o'the sins of the drunk jaud. Ha' ye nane o'yer ane, I wad like to ken? Drink, did ye say? Aye, grand young leddy that are sae prood o'yer bonny face and yer braw claise, gin ye suffered like me, ye wad, maybes, drink like me."

As she spoke she tore open her dress and displayed to the horrified eyes of the two ladies, a virulent and frightful sore, which seemed eating into her very vitals.

"Aye," she said, "ye dinna like to look at it. What maun it be to feel it?"

"Let us do something for her, my dear Rosa," said Lady Isabella.

"Come back with us into the town," said Rosa. "You shall have a night's lodging at least, and we will send you a doctor, and food and medicine."

"But ye winna gie me a saxpence."

"No," said Rosa.

The woman laughed scornfully, and returned no thanks, but as they turned back she followed them at some little distance. On their way they met the rector of the parish, an excellent man, with whom they had already some slight acquaintance. Leaving Lady Isabella at her lodging, he conducted Rosa and the woman to a poor, but decent looking cottage, where a bed was obtained for the latter. A doctor was sent for, and Rosa having promised in Lady Isabella's name to provide all necessary medicine and food, she took leave of the good clergyman, who remained behind to minister, if possible, to the soul of the poor woman, which seemed not less diseased than her body.

Rosa's mind, as she walked homewards, was entirely occupied by the miserable spectacle of moral and physical wretchedness she had just witnessed. "Oh, how thankful she ought to be to God, for having preserved her from such

depths of degradation, and how she ought to love Him and serve Him evermore, for His goodness.

It was now dark, and for a short part of the way her path lay under trees, which growing on each side of the road, formed it almost into an avenue. Under this leafy arcade, there were seats for the benefit of the visitors of Peversley. When Rosa first entered this shady place, she fancied it was quite unoccupied, but as she advanced she saw a person rise from a seat at a little distance and advance in the direction in which she was coming. As the person approached she saw he was a gentleman, and as he drew nearer still, there was something in his figure and walk, which made her heart throb nervously.

"It is quite impossible," she said to herself. He was on the same side of the way that she was, and dreading she knew not what, she walked a little aside, almost into the middle of the road. The gentleman was walking with his face bent downwards, but just as he passed

Rosa—aroused perhaps by the sound of her footsteps—he raised his head, and the pale, grave, gentle, never-to-be-forgotten features of Robert Clifden met her bewildered gaze. She uttered a slight involuntary exclamation and made a hasty step towards him, but he instantly turned away his head, and walked on.

“Rosa stood still for a moment, bewildered. Had he seen her? Should she follow him? Was it indeed he? or had her imagination played her some fantastic trick?”

She was almost inclined to think the latter. Slowly at first, and then almost running from her rapidity, she returned homewards, her mind excited almost to fever. Arrived there, she told what had happened to Lady Isabella. The latter was inclined to think it was the effect of imagination.

“My love,” she said, “if it were possible that he could have wished to pass you, it is impossible that he could have looked as if he did not know you.”

CHAPTER VI.

LADY Isabella's opinion with regard to Rosa's supposed meeting with Robert Clifden seemed to the understanding of the latter, conclusive, yet instinctively, and as it appeared to herself unreasonably, she could not shake off the feeling that she had seen him, or divest herself of a nervous expectation between anxiety and dread to meet him again. It was fortunate that she had another object to occupy her mind in the wretched woman whom she and Lady Isabella

had encountered the same evening on which she fancied she had seen Robert.

The following morning, the clergyman, whose name was Mr. Greenwood, had called on Lady Isabella to tell her the result of his visit and to consult with her on what was to be done. It was, he said, the opinion of the surgeon that the miserable creature could not survive very many weeks and perhaps might not live so long. Her bodily sufferings were dreadful and the state of her mind not less so. To turn her out to die was impossible—to send her in the state she was to her own parish equally so; yet to maintain her as long the prolongation of her wretched life might render necessary, might be very expensive. Mr. Greenwood was a married man, with a family, and the claims of his own flock were indeed more than he could satisfy. He laid the case before Lady Isabella, who at once engaged to furnish money for her lodgings, while Rosa offered to pay for any medicine which might be necessary for her.

The latter then enquired of Mr. Greenwood if the poor woman had no family or relations to whom application might be made. He had asked her, he said, but she had replied that she had none. As far as he could understand her Scotch, she had said :

“Nobody in the world cared for her. She had once a son, but he was now dead, and a daughter ; but she had run off against her mother’s wishes, with a young carpenter, and was now with her husband in Australia. She had not heard of her for years. Her own husband, who had long been dead, had been married twice, and she had a step-daughter ; but she was a ‘perfect devil,’ and though she had plenty money, would do nothing for her. The latter would be glad, she said, to see her lying there, for she hated her, and she would die before she should have the triumph of knowing the state to which she was reduced.”

Such at least was the substance of what she had told Mr. Greenwood. It was fearful indeed to contemplate such a state of mind as hers.

She had loudly and violently demanded spirits, and on their being refused had broken forth into the most dreadful imprecations and declared she would go away, and had even attempted to do so. But utter weakness and pain had prevented her, and she could find no relief for her rage save in cursing herself, her fate, her benefactors, and even the Great Being who has appointed suffering as the consequence of sin.

Mr. Greenwood recommended Rosa not to go to see her, at least in her present frame of mind. She spoke, he said, with a sort of fierce love of her lost son, who, she said, had been taken from her, she supposed, because he was the only creature who loved her. "The rich," she said, "always hated and oppressed the poor, and she knew the present kindness of Lady Isabella was only a refined mode of torturing her." Mr. Greenwood said he hoped to convince her of the contrary, and that if she could be brought into a more softened state of feeling, he thought a visit from Rosa might do her good. At present

it could only wound and agitate the latter without benefiting the former.

Another and very different source of excitement for Lady Isabella and her young friend was the arrival of Lord and Lady Heatherbrae. Their coming created an immense sensation in Pevensley, as a Peer and Peeress were rare guests in that little out-of-the-gay-world watering place. They arrived very late in the evening, but the event was immediately communicated to Lady Isabella by a note from her nephew, containing the further important information, that Lady Heatherbrae was very much fatigued by her journey, which she had found a very tiresome one. They were "both all anxiety to see their aunt."

The next morning Lady Isabella rose earlier than usual. By eleven o'clock she was dressed ready to go out. The activity and interest she displayed were quite wonderful. Not one cross or irritable thing had she said the whole morning, although Rosa had upset a box

of pins, and Helen's dress had caught on the fire irons and they had clashed on the fender with a tremendous rattle,—a misfortune which at a less auspicious time might have caused headache and low spirits for the entire day.

"And now my dear Rosa," said her patroness, "you may accompany me or stay at home exactly as you please, but if not disagreeable to you, I should prefer taking you with me. I should like to make my nephew acquainted with one whom I regard as my own child."

Rosa was too much affected by this speech to reply, otherwise than by a grateful glance, and an affectionate pressure of the hand. Then she tried to prepare herself to accompany Lady Isabella. She could hardly herself decide whether or not she wished to see Lady Heatherbrae. She nerved herself, however, to the best of her power to bear all she might chance to hear from the latter.

They were shown into the best parlour of the little hotel, which, when they entered, was un-

tenanted; but in the course of a minute or two, a fashionable-looking, rather handsome young man lounged into the apartment. On seeing, however, by whom it was occupied, his somewhat nonchalant features assumed a livelier expression, and he quickened his pace as Lady Isabella rose from her seat.

“How do you do, aunty? How well you are looking! I did not expect so early a visit from you.” As he spoke, he returned her kiss with some affection. She then introduced him to Rosa, as the dear young friend she had so often mentioned in her letters to his father. Lord Heatherbrae had evidently never heard of Rosa before, but he was too polite to say so, and expressed himself duly gratified with the pleasure of making her acquaintance. His aunt then enquired for his wife.

“Lady Heatherbrae is not dressed yet. From the account I had given her of your invalid habits, she did not expect you so early. But I am so glad, my dear aunt, to see you so much better.”

"My improvement is entirely owing to this dear girl."

"Then I am sure, my dear aunt, all your relations are infinitely indebted to Miss Grey." As he spoke, he regarded Rosa with some interest, not unmixed with admiration. Lady Isabella was just beginning to speak again, when Lady Heatherbrae, in an extremely elegant morning toilet, glided into the room.

The same Louisa Cooper as ever ! fair, cold, self-satisfied, and immoveable ; by the morning light perhaps a little, a very little faded, and the former insipidity of her countenance qualified by a tinge of peevishness. Her husband instantly presented her to his aunt, who had advanced to meet her. Very cold was Lady Heatherbrae's reception of the affectionate kiss given by the latter, but she was studiously, or perhaps I ought say *studiedly*, polite, for she had wisdom enough to know that it might be worth while to propitiate her husband's rich aunt. This was exactly the kind and degree of wisdom she did possess

She had heard that Lady Isabella Mac Whin was an invalid, and liked to be considered so, therefore, in a drawling, affected tone of sympathy, she began to enquire how the latter felt, if it were not too early for her to be out, &c. As she spoke, Lady Isabella regarded her anxiously, and answered quietly but coldly,

“My health is better at present than it has been for years. I suspect I have hitherto pursued a wrong system, and lived too much to myself. Among other things, I am very much indebted to the agreeable society of this dear girl, who, I believe, is an old acquaintance of yours.”

Lady Hatherbrae regarded Rosa haughtily and carelessly, and seemed, Rosa suspected, feigning to forget where she had seen her.

“Miss Grey,” said Lady Isabella with gentle dignity.

“Oh—oh, by the by—I beg your pardon—I really forgot. You were once at Riversthwaite, were you not?”

But it was not in the power of Lady Heatherbrae to mortify Rosa. If Miss Cooper had been indifferent to Mrs. Clifden's dependent niece, Lady Heatherbrae was now, in manner at least, insolent to the Companion of her husband's aunt. Lord Heatherbrae appeared to feel his wife's want of politeness, for taking from the table an illustrated volume of Poetry, he asked Rosa if she had seen it yet. His aunt bestowed upon him a glance of approbation, but continued conversing with his wife, without appearing to notice her rudeness; though both Rosa and Lord Heatherbrae felt that she had noticed it. But Lady Heatherbrae was so thoroughly encased in the double armour of stupidity and conceit as to be proof against much stronger signs of disapprobation. Anxious to obtain the information which her young friend so much desired, Lady Isabella now asked her new niece if she had seen anything of the Riversthwaite family. As she put the question, she directed towards Rosa an anxious,

though furtive glance. But the latter gave no sign. She talked on to Lord Heatherbrae, most heroically, though her ears and attention were strained to catch every syllable of the answer.

"I called to say good bye two or three weeks before I was married. They intended to go somewhere for change of air, but had not made up their minds where to go, and really I have been so much occupied (with a degree of pique in her tone) that I have never thought of them since. Neither aunt nor nephew were ever favourites of mine, though I am sure I pity them now."

"Pity them—why?" asked Lady Isabella, again stealing a look at Rosa. The latter still maintained an apparent composure, though she was now answering Lord Heatherbrae at random.

"Oh, for their unfortunate situation of course."

"But I do not know their situation."

"Oh la! don't you? and it is so long ago now, I have almost forgotten how it was."

But Mrs. Clifden, for I forget how long, has quite lost the use of her limbs, and her mind is gone a good deal, they say, and she speaks so that it is hardly possible to understand her—quite in a second childhood.”

“Indeed—you do not say so,” cried Rosa, shocked and astonished.

“Oh, yes, it is quite true,” continued Lady Heatherbrae in the most indifferent tone, and as if she had now had enough of the subject, glancing for an instant at Rosa as the latter spoke, but addressing her answer to Lady Isabella.

“And Mr. Conway Clifden—how does *he* bear this family affliction?”

“I am sure I don’t know. He was always a disagreeable creature. I never could bear him, though (with a little malicious laugh) it was very ungrateful of me I dare say. But of course he is as attentive to his aunt as he can, under his circumstances, poor creature, as a large fortune depends on her good will. But

of course being stone-blind does not improve his temper."

Here poor Rosa started violently, grew red and then deadly pale. She was now absolutely silent, and Lord Heatherbrae perceiving her distress, good-naturedly took up a newspaper, and asked his aunt if she had read a romantic story of real life which was then going the round of the press. Lady Heatherbrae, as she finished her account of the Riversthwaite family, suppressed a yawn and began to play with her watch-chain, as if she were heartily tired of the subject. Shortly afterwards, and only waiting till Rosa had regained her self-possession, Lady Isabella took leave, inviting her nephew and niece to dine at her lodgings. She leant on Rosa's arm, as she always did when they walked, pressing it frequently, but speaking not a word.

As soon, however, as they were in the house, and alone together, she kissed her tenderly, made her sit down on the sofa, and got a glass of wine for her herself;

"Courage, my child !" she said, "it might have been worse."

"Blind !—Blind !" At first Rosa could say no more, but after she had drunk the wine, she burst into tears, and then she said,

"Thank God he is living ; but this is a terrible calamity. And Mrs. Clifden !"

Before Rosa's mind's eye rose the proud, stately, handsome figure of her uncle's widow, at whose haughty mien all things had seemed to bow, and when she thought of what disease had made her, she wept for her too. Could these things be ? She did not doubt it, but they *would* not seem real to her imagination, though the knowledge of them oppressed her heart. For some minutes she sat musing sadly.

Lady Isabella watched her with interest. She judged that it was better to leave her to her own meditations. Lady Isabella's thoughts were at present much more occupied by her young friend than by herself. It was many years since she had been half so well. At last breaking her

mournful silence, and starting from her seat, while a sudden light irradiated her countenance, she exclaimed—

“It *was* Robert I saw the other day. I see it all now. The invalid lady at Victoria House is Mrs. Clifden.”

Lady Isabella saw it too. The description they had received from Helen, agreed exactly with the account Lady Heatherbrae had given.

What was to be done was now the question. Lady Isabella thought at first that she might call on Mrs. Clifden, but a very little consideration induced both the ladies to abandon this idea. Rosa's writing to Robert which, under any other circumstances, would have been the best plan, was now of course not to be thought of. Robert was blind. He could not read her letter himself, and that it should meet the eye of any other person was a thought not to be endured. Neither Rosa nor her friend could think of any other way of bringing about an interview than by Rosa accosting him, if they should meet

again in their walks, and that they should do so seemed almost certain. Awkward and uncomfortable as such a meeting must be, it seemed less awkward and uncomfortable than calling or writing.

While Rosa feigned to be occupied by a book, Lady Isabella rang the bell, and having given Helen some orders, enquired if she ever saw anything of the family at Victoria House.

“Oh yes, my lady; on sunny days the paralytic lady mostly goes out in a Bath chair, and the poor young gentleman, her son, walks beside her. But every morning, my Lady, when it does not rain, he walks by himself in the promenade below the trees, and in the afternoon, he goes out driving in the open carriage—a pony carriage, my lady, the prettiest grey ponies with long tails. But they say they are going away to-morrow, as the old lady does not find the air here do her much good.”

Rosa started and looked at Lady Isabella. The latter asked Helen if she was quite sure her information was correct.

"Quite sure, my lady, I had it from the grocer's wife who had it from one of the servants at Victoria House, that is, the woman said if the paralytic lady did not change her mind; but they say, my lady, she often does, she is very ill to do with they say, often does things by contraries. Her son, they say, is so devoted to her and bears with everything, it is quite beautiful to see him. They say there never was anybody like him, he is so sweet-tempered, but in very low spirits—poor young gentleman, and no wonder wanting his eyes."

"How do you know, Helen, that he is the lady's son?"

"Everybody thinks so, my lady. They have the same name."

"And what is their name, do you know?"

"It is—how stupid I am, my lady. I am sure I have it at my very tongue's end. It begins with a C, I am certain. How very strange—I am sure I heard it this morning."

Lady Isabella now dismissed Helen, the latter

much relieved at having been permitted for once to indulge in a little harmless gossip about her neighbours.

"I shall not see him," said Rosa despondingly.

"Had not we better go out now?" said Lady Isabella. "We may meet him in the promenade."

Rosa replied by tying with trembling fingers her bonnet which she had unfastened, and they set out again together.

It was Lady Isabella's second walk that day but she had never even thought of being tired. They walked the whole length of the promenade without catching a glimpse of the person they sought. Rosa, who had at first trembled with nervous dread at the idea of meeting Robert Clifden, now sickened with disappointment. They were already more than half way along the promenade on their return, when on the same side of the road, seated on a seat which formed a circle round the trunk of a tree, but so placed that they did not see him till they were

close beside him, Rosa recognised Robert Clifden. Her heart gave one tremendous bound, and she uttered a faint exclamation. Whether from the unexpected sound close beside him, or from some other cause, Robert Clifden made a hasty movement, and the flap of his coat catching a walking-stick which leant against the seat, threw it down. He stooped to recover it, but had groped for it in vain for a second or two, when Rosa picked it up and put it into his hand.

"Thank you kindly," he said with gentle gratitude.

"You are welcome," said Rosa in a husky, tearful voice.

He started, and the blood rushed into his pale face. Then he said in a voice which was not free from agitation,

"I beg your pardon, but I am blind, and for a moment your voice sounded to me like the voice of an old friend."

All that Rosa could utter in reply was the one word,

"Robert!"

Again the start and the deep flush, far deeper than before, accompanied by a violent heaving of the chest. Then he stretched out his hands, anxiously and eagerly:

"Speak, speak!" he cried.

She could not for a second, but she placed both her hands in his.

"Surely," he said, "this can be none but _____"

"Rosa." She finished his sentence.

The pale melancholy features of the blind young man lighted up with joy.

"Rosa!" he repeated, "and she still remembers, still recognises her old friend."

"Robert," she said in a voice of pain, "do not speak thus, or I shall think you have not forgiven me."

"Have I anything to forgive you, Rosa?"

"Yes. I have long felt that my conduct was selfish and ungrateful. All I have to say in excuse for it, is, that at the time I was not aware of it."

“Will you not sit down by me on this seat, Rosa, and if it does not pain you much, speak a little of those old times, and tell me where you live now, and if you are well and happy.”

In complying with this request, Rosa looked round for Lady Isabella, but she was gone. She could just catch a glimpse of her retreating figure at the end of the vista of trees. She then sat down by Robert, and he continued,

“I will not deny, Rosa, that at first, and for a long time afterwards, I thought you were unkind; but you do me injustice if you suppose there was ever a time after the very first that I did not forgive you. I never forgot the provocation you had received, and I always made allowance for the high and generous spirit which I have always admired in you. But lately, since my own privations have forced me to look more into my own heart, and to take, I trust, more candid and charitable views of others, I have been convinced that in truth I had nothing to forgive you. I now see that your seeming cold-

ness and harshness were intended for kindness. All I knew of your character—and who could know it as I had done?—forbade any other construction of your actions. And yet, Rosa, you must forgive me now, if I say, however well you meant, you were mistaken. Perhaps it *was* better, hopeless as matters were for me, that we should be separated; but nothing would have consoled me like your friendship—and that, however imprudent and thoughtless I may have been, I cannot yet think I ever did anything to forfeit. I do not say this to reproach you, but to persuade you, for your *friendship* (he pronounced the word with marked emphasis) is still to me the dearest treasure this world contains.”

Rosa could have sobbed with the various emotions which almost stifled her; she could hardly find voice to say,

“It is—it always has been yours.”

“Thank you, and bless you for ever. Even this life, then, has its light.”

Rosa remarked the word, and guessed the

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fullness of meaning it had now for him, to whom returned

“Nor even, nor morn.”

But a deep, though chastened joy, to which she had long been a stranger, had taken possession of her heart. Robert’s feelings were not unlike her own: and for some seconds both were silent in new found calm of mind. Robert was the first to speak.

“You must not think me ungenerous, but I should like to hear you confess that it would have been better to have answered my letter.”

“Your letter, Robert! I never had a letter from you; how often have I wondered that you did not answer mine.”

“You wrote to me, Rosa, did you say? Heaven is my witness, that though I have written you three letters, I have never had a line from you since the hour when we parted under the elm tree at Riversthaite.”

“I wrote to you that same night, before I quitted Riversthaite, and it was with the know-

ledge and permission of Mrs. Clifden, who promised that my farewell note should be conveyed to you."

Again Robert's pale face glowed; but this time it was with a different emotion. His lip trembled, he gasped, and starting to his feet, raised his hand in a menacing attitude.

"And who has dared to do me this foul wrong? Were it my own—"

"Stop, Robert," cried Rosa, taking his hand and compelling him by a power he could not resist—

"We have both been deeply injured; but to God, and not to man, it belongs to avenge."

Robert became deadly pale, and breathed hard, while he once more held Rosa's hand with a convulsive clasp, as if he feared it would be snatched from him. His tone was not yet devoid of bitterness, as he rejoined,

"And He has avenged it."

"Yes, yes," said Rosa, "and the more reason we should forgive it."

"I have forgiven much."

"Dear Robert, I know you will think better of this. Have we, too, not erred, and is not our light greater?"

Robert turned towards her his sightless eyes with an expression unutterably sad and *seeking*, if I may use the term.

"My consolation! I have as much need of your eyes to see the moral world, as the world of nature." Then as he spoke, he seemed suddenly to recollect himself, and added in a calm, dignified tone, "I beg your pardon, Rosa; I meant that I thank you for recalling me to a sense of a Christian's temper and duty. I did not think I should so soon have forgotten the lessons I have received: I am but a poor, frail, being. But I must procure your letter, if it be yet—"

"No, no, Robert, let us not recall those times; let us, rather, begin," she said, with a suppressed sigh, "a new chapter of our friendship. We believe and trust each other, and require no document to prove that we have spoken the truth.

If a mystery rests over any part of the past, let it rest still."

"You were ever magnanimous. Let it be as you please."

After a very short pause, he continued, in a livelier tone,

"And now, Rosa, my recovered friend, if you have time, will you tell me where you are now living, and if you are well and happy?"

"I have time, if you have, Robert."

"I—I have always time."

Rosa's heart bled. She felt more pain than she had unintentionally given : without any comment, however, and with the sympathy only which her tones involuntarily expressed—but that was almost unbounded—she began to give an account of her present situation, and of the position, character, and extreme kindness of Lady Isabella Mac Whin. Her ladyship's little weaknesses and faults she passed over, under the general term, "nervous," but was eloquent in the description of her better qualities.

"You are happy then, Rosa, with this kind friend," he said, Rosa almost fancied, with a sigh.

"I am sure I ought to be," she replied. She then continued, "And now will you tell me how long Mrs. Clifden has been thus sadly afflicted."

"Her first attack was shortly after you left Riversthaite. But Rosa, should you like to hear the whole tale of our errors and sufferings?"

This was exactly what Rosa had wished to hear, but she had not liked to ask. Robert continued:

"I will not pain you by describing the state of my feelings the morning after you left Riversthaite, when I found you were gone, whither I knew not, and without a word of farewell. I shall only say that disappointment and resentment had made me savage—almost mad. I sat in my own room. My aunt sent for me to come to the breakfast-room, but I refused and

passed the whole day without meeting. The following day she came to me, and first ordered, then intreated me not to leave her thus alone. I replied that I intended to leave her altogether—that I would remain no longer at Riversthaite. You know my aunt's dignity. She seemed to forget it now, and reproached me with ingratitude for all the affection and indulgence she had ever shown me. Then she wept almost hysterically, and besought me not to leave her—most solemnly protesting you had gone of your own free will; and I did not doubt her, for I recognised yourself in the whole action. But I replied that she had driven you to it, and remained obstinate in my determination. She told me that if I went, it would break her heart. I answered coldly that I should depart the following morning. I shall never forget her appearance as I announced in a tone which left no hope, this, my unalterable intention. She suddenly ceased her entreaties, and her features becoming ghastly pale and rigid, while she drew

up her figure to its full, commanding height, she said,

“Go, then, obstinate and ungrateful boy, and be happy in the idea that you have killed your best friend!’

“I did not give much heed to these words at the time. My resolution seemed to me as just as my indignation—I did not suspect myself of gratifying revenge or of rejoicing in the pain I knew I was about to inflict. I can never have but one opinion of my aunt’s conduct to you, Rosa, but she was a thorough woman of the world, and I see now that it was consonant with her own idea of right. Nature and education had conspired to render her incapable of appreciating you, or understanding the nature of the affection I entertained for you. I had no right to expect to gather grapes of thistles. How often since have I thought this, and yet this very morning I required to be reminded of it.

“My things were packed. I was almost dressed to set off by an early train the following

morning with a vague idea of going in quest of you, and of obtaining at least one word of farewell, when information was brought me that my aunt was taken suddenly ill. At first I suspected it of being a pretence, and sullenly refused to go to her. But on being told she was insensible, somewhat alarmed, I went, suspecting, however, nothing more than a fainting fit. At the first glance I saw it was something much worse. She was laid upon the bed half dressed without sense or motion. Her face was pale, and the features drawn as if by a violent spasm. I felt so shocked I had nearly fallen. What if she should never recover, and if the last words of her, who whatever had been her faults, had loved me with no common love, were to be those she had spoken yesterday. And then I felt I *had* killed her. I felt as if the brand of murder was on my soul, and I vowed to God that if it would please Him to restore her, to devote to her every energy I possessed.

“ Her restoration was much more rapid than

I had ventured to hope, and at that time more complete. In less than a fortnight she had recovered the use of her limbs, her senses, and speech. Only an extreme debility remained. If it were possible, her fondness for me seemed to have increased. She could hardly bear me out of her sight, and when I moved in the room, her eyes followed me from place to place, as if she dreaded to lose sight of me a single instant. She never alluded to the past, and I sometimes wondered if she remembered it. One slight circumstance, however, at last convinced me that she did. One day I had come into her room with my hat in my hand. She asked me where I was going. I replied to take a drive. It was the first I had taken since her illness.

“‘You are not going to leave me,’ she said quickly, her eyes brightening with eagerness and an anxious dread seeming to deprive her of breath. I answered solemnly:

“‘While we both live, I will never leave you.’

“Never shall I forget the change of her countenance—the ecstasy of relief, the entire satisfaction which overspread it, or the fervour of the tone in which she bade God bless me for ever. It was at this juncture, Rosa, I wrote to you. For while my aunt’s life had hung in the balance some feeling I can hardly explain had withheld me. I wrote, as I have said, three letters, there being about a fortnight’s interval between each. They, as well as yours to me, must have been suppressed, and I guess now who was the agent of their interception.

“In time, and as my aunt began to be able to move about, and in a great measure to resume her old habits, I could not avoid remarking little changes in her disposition. She frequently betrayed a sort of querulousness of temper, a slight jealousy of her authority, which before she never used to question, and an aptness to take offence if she could by any means construe anybody’s words or actions into a hint that she was less able than formerly in mind or

body. To Springer, who used to be such a favourite, she had taken an extreme and somewhat unaccountable dislike. I proposed that she should get rid of the woman immediately. But some fancied obstacle appeared to stand in the way. At last, however, to our great relief, she gave warning herself, with that civil insolence for which she is so remarkable. She had been engaged by Lady Cooper. To my surprise my aunt not only parted with her amicably but made her a handsome present which she received without much gratitude, and as if it were entirely her due. I never saw my aunt appear so much relieved as when this woman was gone.

“About a year after my aunt’s illness, I was returned member for Marlepool and took my seat in parliament. With eagerness I rushed upon my new career, and during the session after my election found solace and interest in my new duties. The reception of my speeches in the house gave me the proud hope that if I might not find happiness at my own

hearth, I might yet enjoy the unspeakable satisfaction of serving my country. So passed the spring and summer after my election.

“ And now, my dear friend, I approach the period of my misfortunes. One winter night, when the snow was on the ground and the frost was very hard, I was returning from dining at the Delaneys, when my eyes were attracted by a light in the sky, in the direction of Ellerdale. It struck me immediately it must be a fire, and I ordered the coachman to drive in that direction. I found I was not mistaken. A whole row of cottages were in a blaze. Of course I instantly got out and united my efforts to those of the rest assembled there, to do what I could to save life and property. Of the former there was no loss. I was happy enough to succeed in saving the life of one poor, bedridden woman, who, having no relatives, had been forgotten in an attic, till it was almost too late. It was nearly morning when I returned to Riversthwaite. I was much exhausted, but did not feel ill then—not burnt,

but only a little scorched. As soon as I was in bed I fell asleep.

“From that time I have no recollection of anything that happened for two or three weeks, but when I recovered my consciousness I found I had had a severe illness and was even still in great danger, and suffering considerable pain, more especially in my eyes. In time this pain, all pain left me, but I remained as you now see me, sightless.

“At first I did not doubt I should recover the use of my eyes—the idea of being blind for life never once struck me ; but as day after day, and week after week passed on in everlasting darkness, the terrible dread sprang up and increased. Of course I neglected no means of cure. I consulted the first oculists in the world, and submitted to all the tortures they proposed. Anxious as I was during that period, what I endured both mentally and bodily was nothing as long as hope remained. But at last, when my doom became evident, and I knew that the

darkness of the tomb was my portion for life, a deep despondency fell upon my spirits. Death seemed to me infinitely preferable. During all this period the care and tenderness of my aunt were unremitting. Day and night she watched and almost more than shared my anxieties.

“And when at last the truth was forced upon her conviction, although I believe her distress was not less than mine, she did not sink under it as I had done. Her natural strength of mind manifested itself. I believe, as long as she was unchanged by disease, there was nothing my aunt could not have borne but the loss of my affection. The loss of worldly consequence, which would have been next in the order of trials, would, I truly believe, have been as nothing in comparison. But now she supported me, she read to me herself, walked with me, drove with me. Her affection seemed almost to have developed in her new powers. Her perseverance in reading what she could not possibly understand, and could not have the slightest interest in, was truly wonderful.

"I felt grateful to her, but my gratitude, like everything else, oppressed me. An utter apathy appeared to have taken possession of my whole being.

"But I was aroused from this condition by a new shock. My aunt was seized with another attack, and a much worse than her first. For many weeks, for nearly two months, she lay in a state that might almost be called one of insensibility. I could be of no service or comfort to her or to any one, and nothing in the world appeared to have the power to give me comfort or hope. Cut off from every chance of usefulness, from all hope of sympathy, from all communion with nature, my mind confined for ever to the dungeon of my own body, I passed my solitary days in a chair by the fire in my own room, eating and sleeping forming the sole incidents of my life, and bulletins of my aunt's health its sole interest; and these were never cheering. I had of course a man to attend to me and to read to me, but I detested the sound of his voice, and mere intellectual ad-

vancement possessed no longer an interest for me. It seemed only to remind me of my past hopes, and to point out their utter futility. It was again the winter season, and the weather so wet and disagreeable I could not go out.

“ At first my solitary musings were only of a sort of dull despair over the hardness of my fate, the disappointment which had met me at every turn, the dreariness, the hopelessness, the vanity of life. But by degrees they extended themselves over my past existence—its early aspirations, its lost friendships, not so much in their loss as in the happiness they had at the time afforded, and I was surprised now to find how much real and substantial happiness I had owed to these human feelings; nay, how much more true wisdom and insight into life and truth they had given me than all my solitary and abstract philosophisings about the nature and capabilities of man; and now that my own wants, my own dependence, my own trials had taught me what man’s nature, man’s weak-

ness, his affections, his ignorance, and obstinate adherence to error really are, I saw how inapplicable were all my previous theories, and how fruitless to produce any real good.

“Not, Rosa, that I should ever be guilty of depreciating the intellect as a means either of happiness or usefulness, or as a very important element in friendship. It is in many instances the common field on which two minds meet, the great bond of sympathy between them, but it is in the sympathy itself, in the reciprocity, that the chief charm and the chief benefit lie. The pleasure is in beholding our own tastes, our own sentiments appreciated and shared. A living impulse is given to our thoughts and actions—a sentient soul breathed into the cold and lifeless mechanism of thought, which can only perceive and not feel. God is love, and those who do His holy work must do it—I speak it with reverence—in His own spirit, in the spirit of Him who became human, that He and we, His own redeemed, might work and suffer as brethren

But I did not see all this at once. I only saw how I had thrown away the past. I did not see how I might ameliorate the future. On this side of the grave lay a thick darkness, an endless and loveless monotony. On the other side it appeared all vague and misty. I remembered that Edward Mason had said it was not so, that his sister had written to me that amidst the extremest suffering and privation, he had departed with a song of triumph in his mouth. And then it seemed to me that it was much easier to die than to live.

“Atheism and infidelity I had ever held in abhorrence, but my notions, frequently as I had discussed the matter with Edward Mason, were very vague and loose. I had read the Bible frequently it is true, and with the intensest admiration and approbation. I hardly knew whether most to admire the awful majesty of the Mosaic narrative, or the equally sublime simplicity of that of the Evangelists—the godlike events related in the one, and the still more godlike

morality aimed at in the precepts and exemplified in the life detailed in the other—where both are narrated with an unadorned grandeur which ever appeared to me commensurate with the subjects. A profound and instinctive consciousness of the power of the Creator had been present with me from my earliest childhood. I knew I was faulty, that all men were so; I had also a vague belief that somehow God was merciful, and if we did our best would never punish us for what we could not help; and I always thought it probable that in some mysterious way, this remission might be granted through the life and death of the Holiest who had ever worn the garb of humanity. This vague confidence I called faith, and this world, this life, and all I was to do for the good cause in it, so occupied my mind, that I remained perfectly satisfied. But now that this world was absolutely nothing, that I had, or thought I had no duty, no pleasure, no hope in it, as I brooded over these things, I began to wonder if there might not be after all some

clearer prospect of another, some more certain assurance of happiness there, some better remedy for the evils and sorrows of this. If this remedy were to be found at all, it seemed to me it must be in the Scriptures, for I remembered Edward Mason, and began to suspect that the qualities I had attributed altogether to a noble nature, might after all have had some other source, as he had himself invariably affirmed. Nature I had abundantly felt was at all events inadequate to afford consolation for the ills of life. I now resolved to read the Bible with the one view of finding there the strength I sought, and ere I read, I prayed in an agony almost of anxiety and hope that my search might be successful. It was of course a great inconvenience to be forced to employ another and an indifferent person thus to minister to the wounds of my soul.

“I did not care much what people thought, and I did not mind that the world should say that Robert Clifden had become one of the saints,

but my character is naturally intensely reserved, and I could scarce bear in my pride that any one should even guess my sufferings and my humiliation. But at last the interest of my studies drove away all other thoughts, and dark though my days were, a heavenly light broke at last on my soul. How it came, or whence, I can hardly tell; it seemed to come like day, first a gentle, hope-inspiring dawn, then a refreshing morning light, clear, but intermingled with long shadows—then the ever-brightening day, clearing away all shades and mists as the sun of my knowledge and faith rose higher and higher.

“And now I saw that the Faith of the Gospel is not only a remedy for the consequences of sin, but a medicine for the disease itself; I saw how, the affections being fixed on that alone which can never fail them, disappointment and despair are impossible. I now also began to read the lives of the most distinguished among those who have openly marched in their public career, under the banner of the Cross, from the early

times of the church down to the present day, and as I read of the works they had done and the good they had left behind them, I could not avoid a sigh that there was no hope that I might follow, however humbly, in their footsteps. And then, Rosa, I tried, and not without help, to learn the lesson to submit—a harder one it seemed than to work. At last I began to think that as every one has some place in this world, there might be one for me too. I longed to be not altogether a cumberer of the earth. First of all I had a Sunday school of the village children, as memory and a little preparation during the week sufficiently supplied the want of sight. By degrees, knowledge of and interest in the children led me to seek the acquaintance of the parents.

“I found them generally disposed to receive me in a most friendly manner, partly because I had always been liberal to them in time of sickness and want, partly because they pitied me, and sympathised with the manner in which my sufferings were caused, though what had I done

but follow one of the better impulses of human nature?

“ The pleasure I derived from this new companionship was quite surprising to myself. Amid all the tediousness and the twaddle and the gossip with which intercourse with the poor is intermixed, there is much of even the highest good to be obtained. I blushed for my own repinings when I saw how cheerfully much greater griefs were sometimes borne. Even the new sentiment of being in sympathy with my kind was a pleasure to me. It was a pleasure to teach and a pleasure to learn, and I learnt much more than I taught, and through what I learnt my teaching was made more efficient.

“ Thus, Rosa, I recovered my peace of mind. Happiness in the common sense of the term I have resigned. It is not for me. I am content to do without it—to live a quiet, humble life, with one hope to dispel its darkness.

“ But in some respects I have anticipated my story. In the course of about three months after her

illness my aunt attained the stage of amendment in which with slight variations she has remained ever since. And a most painful condition hers is, both for herself and others. Rosa, I would speak with respect of one who has ever been all affection to me, and whose present affliction of itself entitles her to tenderness from those whom any moment might reduce to the same condition. She has completely lost the use of both her limbs ; her speech can only be understood by those well accustomed to it ; the powers of her mind are deplorably weakened and her temper has become painfully irritable.

“ Her fondness for me is undiminished, but it is attended with a jealousy and doubt of my affection for her, which is abundantly painful. But enough of this subject. And now, Rosa, I have told you all, and again I ask your friendship, as the greatest blessing the earth contains.”

“ And Robert, I accept yours as the greatest advantage—the greatest honour I could receive in this world.” Rosa’s voice was half choked

with feelings at once of the most inexpressible admiration, and the profoundest compassion.

"Dear and kind Rosa," he said, "always the same—with more sensibility than any other I ever knew—"

As he spoke he extended his hand. She placed hers in it. He pressed it once firmly and warmly, saying, "We know one another now, and nothing can shake our friendship."

"Nothing," said Rosa, continuing after a short pause, "I have heard that you leave Peversley to-morrow."

"We spoke of doing so, but I think I could induce my aunt to remain a few days longer. I suppose Lady Isabella Mac Whin will have no objection to my calling on you at her lodgings, and you will walk with me again here, Rosa, will you not?"

"Every day while you remain; and as for Lady Isabella, I know she will be delighted to welcome you."

Robert appeared pleased, and then seemed about to say something else, but hesitated.

"You were going to speak, Robert—"

"I wished to ask you another favour, Rosa, but I feared lest I might be asking too much."

"Ask me anything, Robert."

"Will you not then come to see us?"

"But how would your aunt like my visit?"

"Perhaps you will be surprised to hear that she frequently expresses a wish to see you. Previous to her last illness she never mentioned your name, but now she often speaks of you. I have sometimes hoped that she felt sorry for the manner in which she had acted towards you, but at all events, dear Rosa, she is now a sick and dying woman. I know if you were to see her, you could have no feeling towards her but compassion."

"I will come to see her to-morrow, Robert. I would have come this afternoon, but Lady Isabella expects her nephew Lord Heatherbrae and his wife to dinner."

"Lady Heatherbrae!—"

"Yes. Louisa Cooper."

"The most cold-hearted, spiteful woman I ever knew, Rosa; I hope she will do you no harm."

"She cannot with Lady Isabella, who I strongly suspect is not much prepossessed in her favour. But I must go now."

"Go then, and may God bless you!"

CHAPTER VII.

MORE than an hour previous to Rosa's return Lord and Lady Heatherbrae had arrived at Lady Isabella's lodgings.

The gentle Lady Isabella regarded once more the fair, chilling, supercilious face; and well-formed but inflexible figure of her new niece, and felt with regret that it was impossible she could ever love her. Of late Lady Isabella had wished much to have objects of affection and she would have liked to have found them in

her own family. Lord Heatherbrae, though she had seen little of him, had always been a favourite, and she had built quite a little castle in the air of which he and his bride had been the subjects. But Lady Isabella's *Alnascharism* was no exception to the general rule in such cases. She had never liked her nephew so much as now, but she feared for his future happiness with a wife who could not sympathise with his better nature, and was therefore little likely to improve his faults.

On their arrival, Lady Heatherbrae, who had walked, went with her maid to Lady Isabella's dressing-room to arrange her toilet, while her husband sat down tête-à-tête with his aunt.

"You find me alone, my dear," said the latter, "my young friend is out enjoying this fine day."

"I should have been glad at any time to find you alone," said the polite, amiable Heatherbrae, who really liked his aunt whenever he was near her, though for years at a time, he sometimes

forgot her existence; "and I am particularly glad to-day, as Lady Heatherbrae is desirous that I should put you on your guard against the very young person of whom you speak. Louisa knows her well."

"Does she? I should have fancied from her manner that she was scarcely acquainted with her."

"I ought to have said—knows her character and history."

"Well, I too know her character and history."

"From herself no doubt," said Lady Heatherbrae, who had now come into the room and spoke in a tone of passionless acrimony.

"Yes, from herself and from intimate association with her for some years."

Lady Heatherbrae was surprised. She did not know Rosa had been so long with Lady Isabella. But though a little discomfited, she continued;

"Are you aware she was dismissed in disgrace from Riversthwaite?"

"I believe she left that place of her own accord."

Lady Heatherbrae looked coldly incredulous.

"Excuse me, my dear Lady Isabella, but you are so amiable and such a recluse ; but they do say, and I have the best—the very best reason to believe it is quite true, that Miss Grey—is not that the young person's name?—was dismissed on account of her having, in the most artful manner, endeavoured to practise on the affections of Mrs. Clifden's nephew, a raw, sickly youth, who has since lost his sight, but of course a great catch for Miss Rosa."

The unfeeling vulgarity of mind displayed by the elegant Lady Heatherbrae in this speech, shocked her auditor not a little. She asked, not without a slight tone of indignation :

"It may have been that the young man became attached to Miss Grey, but I should like to know in what manner she was artful ? "

"Oh ! I know she was—a man so much above her in position and fortune—who was she

to aspire to such a match?" Wormwood was not more bitter than her Ladyship's tone.

"Surely Lady Heatherbrae, it is quite possible that without Miss Grey's aspiring to a position, which after all was not above her own birth, Mr. Clifden may have admired and loved her. Miss Grey has youth and beauty, a highly cultivated mind, and singularly winning manners. I cannot see that it is necessary to suppose art on her side to account for any man having lost his heart to her."

"Very true 'pon my soul," cried Lord Heatherbrae, who, though the most thoughtless was at the same time the most candid of mortals. "I really never thought of that, I think Louisa my love, you must be wrong. Miss Grey is certainly an excessively handsome girl. I should not have liked to answer for myself, shut up for a whole year with her in a lonely country place. I really do not see that the poor fellow had any chance of saving his heart. I am glad the whole matter is so satisfactorily explained." And

Lord Heatherbrae looked good-naturedly relieved.

Lord Heatherbrae was rather a sensible young man, when indolence would permit his mind fair play, which, however, it rarely did. His easy good-nature and extreme thoughtlessness and carelessness rather than any vicious propensity whatever, had drawn him into debt, which his father was unable to liquidate, and forced him into the necessity of marrying for money, when he would much rather have remained the gay and lazy bachelor he had always been. With good looks, good manners, a long pedigree, and a title, he had not found his object difficult to attain. In London he had first met Lady Cooper and her daughter. The fair Louisa had beauty, some family, and a large fortune with which she was not at all unwilling to purchase for herself rank and title and a handsome husband. And so the matter was arranged to the entire satisfaction of the families of both parties.

At the conclusion of her husband's last speech, Lady Heatherbrae grew pale with anger. Rosa had been her successful rival she more than guessed, though she strove to disbelieve it, with Robert Clifden, and now that tiresome old maid, her husband's aunt, would, she doubted not, leave her part of her fortune. Louisa Cooper could not forgive a double defeat from one whom she had regarded as too much beneath her to come into competition with her. Her husband's ready acquiescence in his aunt's opinion, and openly expressed admiration for Rosa, put the finishing-stroke to her ill-humour, and tossing her head, she said with a trembling voice, and heightened colour,

"I am sure I see no beauty in her. I suppose with a sneer) she's a gentleman's beauty."

"And a lady's too, I am sure," said Lady Isabella; "though her features are not perfect hers is altogether the loveliest face I ever saw."

"I am sure she would never be admired in London," said Lady Heatherbrae, with a rude-

ness surprising in one so apparently refined, and walking to a window with an air at once of petulance and mortification.

Even the nonchalant Lord Heatherbrae blushed for his wife. At last she left the room, saying she must have her maid, as she had done her hair so uncomfortably. Her husband turned to his aunt, and observed in a tone, half apologetic, half explanatory,

"She has those little tiffs now and then, but she soon comes out of them. Generally she is very good-natured."

"I am glad to hear it, my dear boy," said his aunt sadly.

Lord Heatherbrae kissed her with some affection.

"Oh, we shall do very well. She is very pretty and distinguished looking. Our pursuits never interfere with each other. I assure you, there is not the slightest danger of our quarrelling."

"It was not that I feared so much, my dear. But I should have liked *your* wife to have had a warm heart and a strong mind."

Lord Heatherbrae regarded his aunt for a second with a peculiar expression, and coloured slightly. He seemed to answer her thoughts, rather than her words.

“Nothing would ever have made me anything but the sad, thoughtless fellow I am. To have had the tremendous angel you speak of would have killed me with awe; and then my ways might have broken her heart, which would have been a burden for ever on my conscience.”

He spoke lightly and jestingly, and as if he wished to change the grave tone his aunt had given the conversation. A short and slightly awkward pause ensued, which was broken by the entrance of Rosa.

She had not expected to find the Heatherbraes. After she had parted from Robert she had hastened homewards, eager to seek the sympathy of Lady Isabella, who she knew would be eager to learn the result of her interview. As she entered, her intelligent features blooming with exercise, her large brown eyes soft with feeling, her dark

hair straying from beneath her bonnet, and her whole figure and gait full of unconscious grace, Lord Heatherbrae was convinced irrevocably that Rosa Grey could not divest herself of those arts which had proved so dangerous to Robert Clifden, and moreover, that had the latter not fallen a victim to them, in their relative circumstances, he would have been more insensible than altogether became a man.

The return of Rosa was quickly followed by that of Lady Heatherbrae. She bowed to the former with distant coldness, and having selected the most comfortable seat in the room for herself, she took out some work which she dangled in her hand, till the early dinner was announced.

Dinner passed off with a flatness and silence which were almost insupportable. It caused Lady Heatherbrae infinite chagrin to find that her husband and Lady Isabella would treat Rosa in every respect as an equal. For herself she took no notice of her, and tried to mortify her by utter neglect—a kind of behaviour which

totally failed of its aim, and had only the effect of making her husband feel ashamed, and of convincing Lady Isabella still further that her new niece had the smallest mind in the world. After dinner, in the hope of some relief to the tedium of the day, Lady Isabella proposed a drive, which Lady Heatherbrae declined. She had come to Perversley anxious to propitiate her husband's rich relative, but her temper for the time overcame her prudence.

The dullness and disagreeableness of the afternoon which succeeded could hardly have been surpassed. Rosa played and sang. Lady Heatherbrae would do neither, and could not conceal her displeasure at the praises her husband lavished on the performance of her rival. At last the day was done, and it was an unspeakable relief to Lady Isabella to find that the Heatherbraes intended to leave Perversley the next morning.

"It was the most disagreeable, poking little

place in the world," her Ladyship said. "How could Lady Isabella endure it."

Lady Isabella "had never been happier anywhere."

Her nephew laughed good-naturedly, saying "It certainly was awfully slow, but he felt grateful to it for pleasing her." He shook hands cordially with Rosa, but his wife profited by the dim light to go without noticing her at all.

As soon as they were out of the house, Lady Isabella threw herself on the sofa as if quite worn out, heaving a sigh of relief.

Then she rose again, and taking Rosa's hand, she said,

"I am disappointed;—but I have still you to be interested in. I will not return yet to my sick room. Now tell me all—that is all you please."

Rosa complied, and Lady Isabella listened with breathless interest.

"I will go with you to-morrow," she said, "to call on Mrs Clifden."

Accordingly, on the following day, as early as

it seemed likely so great an invalid would be able to receive anybody, Rosa and her friend set out on their somewhat agitating errand. Ere they went Lady Isabella despatched Nelly with some food and medicine and other necessaries for the wretched woman, whom they had succoured a day or two before, and whose end, both the doctor and the clergyman thought fast approaching.

"Mrs. Clifden would see them," said the servant who answered the door, conducting them forthwith to the drawing-room, which was tenanted by Robert alone.

"You have come," he said, "and I have prepared my aunt for your visit."

Rosa then mentioned Lady Isabella as her companion. Robert shook hands cordially with the latter, and said how glad he was his cousin Rosa had found such a friend. Lady Isabella regarded him earnestly, and tears partly of pity, partly perchance of memory, stole into her eyes. She said,

"I have heard much of you from Rosa and have often wished to know you. You are, too, the son of an old friend."

"You knew my mother."

"No, your father, but it seems almost as if it had been in a previous state of existence. It was long before he was married."

There was something in Lady Isabella's tone which held both her auditors silent till she should speak again. She was on the point of doing so, but whether on the same subject neither of them could guess, as the words had not left her lips, when the door was thrown open, and Mrs. Clifden was wheeled into the room. Rosa left her chair, but stopped for a moment, struck by the terrible change, for which even Robert's account had hardly prepared her.

The commanding figure of Mrs. Clifden was shrunk, emaciated, and crippled. The fullness and smoothness and colour had vanished from her handsome face. Her forehead was yellow

and wrinkled, her cheeks sunk and wasted, and her mouth strangely contorted, while her black eyes were sunken and dim. She was dressed like an invalid, in a large shawl and with a close cap showing no hair. Her full, sonorous voice was thick, inarticulate, and somewhat querulous. Rosa could scarcely understand her, as she said :

“So you are Rosa Grey, and you have come to see me at last? Well, how do you do?”

Rosa touched the hand with which Mrs. Clifden had made a slight motion as if to give the customary salutation, and enquired, but somewhat hesitatingly, how she felt.

“Feel, oh, it is only weakness. These doctors are such fools they cannot understand my complaint or I might have been well long ago. It is very hard—very hard indeed,” and she began to cry and even sob, saying, “You find me sadly changed, Rosa. I think you might have enquired for me before, considering I took you when you had nobody.”

“Indeed I did not know you were ill.”

"That was your own fault. But everybody is so foolish. I have sometimes thought you could read to me so much better than Jones. It was so hard for you to have been away when you might have been of use. But I shall take you back with me, and you can read to Robert!"

"My dear aunt!" cried Robert hastily; and then as if not knowing what to say, he continued, "Rosa has forgotten to introduce her friend, Lady Isabella Mac Whin."

"Forgotten to introduce—who did you say?" said Mrs. Clifden turning her vacant face and dim eyes towards Lady Isabella. Rosa hastily introduced "Lady Isabella Mac Whin," speaking close to Mrs. Clifden's ear.

The latter made a sort of inclination in return for the bow of the former, but with an expression at the same time puzzled and fretful:

"I am glad to see Lady—Lady Mac Whin; sorry I did not know before—but everybody keeps me in the dark about everything. But

I won't be treated in this way. Rosa, why did you not tell me—"

"My dear aunt, cried Robert, "you forgot I mentioned to you yesterday—"

"I don't forget, Robert—you are always saying I forget—" she was continuing in an angry, querulous tone, when some recollection appeared to cross her mind, and turning to Lady Isabella, she said, crying again,

"Poor fellow! poor Robert! We must make allowance for him. It is a great trial to me—my greatest—my greatest—and I am sure nobody ever—" Here sobs prevented Mrs. Clifden continuing. All her three auditors remained silent—none knowing what to say or do. Mrs. Clifden was the first herself to speak again.

"You will come to us to-night, Rosa. I have a great deal for you to do."

"Dear aunt! Rosa lives with Lady Isabella Mac Whin now."

"Not if I wish her to return to me surely.

It is her duty—surely you will not prevent **her**, Lady Mac Whin,” said Mrs. Clifden **fretfully** and impatiently and as if she were going to **cry** again.

“It depends entirely on Miss Grey herself,” said Lady Isabella, with gentle dignity. “**Rosa**, my love, choose for yourself, and do not allow a thought of me to interfere with your duty or your happiness.”

Rosa hesitated. She looked at Robert’s pale, eager countenance, and could hear that his breath came quick and anxiously. In an instant he had turned away his face, as if he would not hear the decision, but the movement only convinced her the more, how intensely he desired to hear it. Then to check the impulse which urged her to say, “I will do all I can for you,” came the recollection of Lady Isabella’s unflinching affection and kindness, and all the gratitude she owed her. She turned to her, but could read nothing in her face but its usual gentleness with a slight expression of languor and fatigue.

She felt at that moment that she could not desert her.

Robert himself was the first to confirm this feeling.

"Rosa," he said in a tone, sad, yet decided ;
"do not let the romantic generosity of your temper mislead you to sacrifice your happiness to an imaginary duty. We have no claim on you, Lady Isabella has many."

"Nay, Robert," cried Rosa, "you must not say no claim. You have the claim of friendship, and Mrs. Clifden that of kindred and misfortune."

"We are unreasonable, my love," said Lady Isabella soothingly, and taking Rosa's hand, "to ask you to decide now. Come home with me, and leave the question unsettled till to-morrow."

"So it is best," said Robert, a gleam of hope for an instant lighting up his countenance.

Lady Isabella and Rosa now bade Mrs. Clifden good morning. She had not heard distinctly what had passed—only vaguely surmised that Rosa's return was not quite decided.

“ It will be very ungrateful and very hard, Rosa, if you won’t come back. But it is always the way I am used, and my poor boy cannot see to read—and servants managing everything at Riversthaite. You can go away again when I am well. You must come—I won’t submit to be disobeyed—Robert—Robert—why don’t you speak—you are all alike—even he—the child I would give my life for—does not mind me. But I will teach them.”

And so she continued to mutter, as Rosa and her friend, not knowing what to reply, and glad to escape her complaints, left the room with feelings of profound, though very different kinds of commiseration for both the inmates.

They walked home silently, and then Rosa in violent agitation withdrew to her own room, and sought to compose her spirits, and to obtain light for her understanding in prayer.

But though she grew more composed, the longer she pondered the more she became puzzled. Her own heart told her that she wished

to go to Riversthaite, to help Robert to bear the weight of his many afflictions, to cheer him and to act for him as she knew she only could.

Imaginative, enthusiastic, and ardent as ever, she could picture herself reading to him, writing for him, describing to him the aspects of nature, entering into his opinions and feelings, and restoring to him in some measure the life he had lost. Naturally aspiring, Rosa's ambition had been now purged of all its personality and most of its worldliness. Even for Robert Clifden she did not desire worldly grandeur, or vulgar applause, but she desired field for the talents she fully believed he possessed—the hope and the sense that his life had not been in vain for the world as well as for himself. Even the gloom of Riversthaite, and the deplorable condition of Mrs. Clifden, with the trials and discomforts they could not fail to entail, far from appearing drawbacks, were only additional incentives in the present state of her feelings. She had long suffered under an agony of remorse

for what she believed her ungrateful treatment of Robert Clifden. She had meditated on his mind and character till in her eyes he had almost assumed the lineaments of a demigod; she had passionately desired for years an opportunity of making atonement and now that that opportunity presented itself, it seemed very hard to forego it. But the more earnestly she coveted it, the more anxiously she doubted her own wishes, and dreaded lest they should blind her to her real duty.

Like all truly conscientious, and really humble minded people, Rosa dreaded to be misled and deceived by her own inclinations, and never had she dreaded it so much as in the present case, for to Lady Isabella too she felt a strong attachment, and the very deepest sense of gratitude. Not a day had elapsed since her kind friend had told her with such seeming satisfaction that she had still her to be interested in, and should she be so basely ungrateful as to deprive her of that consolation, and perhaps throw

her back on her old hopeless, nervous condition? She felt that she must not. Then she prayed for strength to make what she now felt to be a sacrifice beyond her own unassisted powers.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE autumn evening had closed in, the curtains were drawn, the lamp lighted, and a cheerful little blaze had been kindled in the grate, ere Rosa found any opportunity of touching on the proposal of the morning. At dinner and at tea Lady Isabella seemed to avoid the subject. She did not appear nervous, or in low spirits, but Rosa had never before seen her so thoughtful or so silent. When she addressed her, she answered absently and betrayed all the

signs of a pre-occupied mind. It was in vain that Rosa endeavoured to divine the state of her feelings, and her friend's unusual manner made her feel a little uneasy. But now when the most sociable time of the day had arrived, when the cheerful blaze, the quiet and the comfort invited to conversation and confidence, Lady Isabella appeared to feel the natural influence of the circumstances, and threw off her former abstraction of manner.

"Rosa, my love," she said, as she seated herself in a corner of a sofa by the fireside, "come and sit by me. I feel I may not have you many nights."

"You may have me all your life, dearest Lady Isabella," Rosa answered, as she took the offered seat and drew affectionately towards her friend.

Lady Isabella turned quickly round, and fixed her eyes enquiringly on those of Rosa. There she could read only openness, sincerity, and affection to herself. She answered kindly :

"I am not so selfish, Rosa, as to wish to have you all my life. That would be a poor destiny for you, my child. Now tell me what you have decided."

"To remain with you, kindest friend, if you desire it." Rosa felt relieved of a load when she had made this announcement. Again her companion regarded her more earnestly than before.

"Rosa," she said, "do not let a mistaken generosity hasten you to a decision, which you may repent, but may never be able to alter."

"I trust I shall never repent doing what is right. No one can, or at least ought."

"But you must be sure it is right."

"I am quite sure it is right, if it is your wish."

"Rosa, tell me candidly—is your decision the result of your preference for my society and the comfort and repose my house can offer you, compared with the society and the duties that would await you at Riversthaite? Do you dread the

dismal task of nursing and bearing with Mrs. Clifden, or do you feel that becoming the companion of her nephew would injure him or yourself ? ”

“ Oh no ! that I do not feel.”

“ Then, Rosa, if you do not feel this, it is not in human nature, knowing what I do of your heart and history, that you should love me better than Robert Clifden. You cannot do for me what you can do for him. Like most young and generous people, your understanding is blinded to your real duty by the glory of making a sacrifice. But I am resolved never to have to reproach myself with permitting you to yield to this—*weakness*, I must call it. Answer me truly, whether have you the greatest attachment to Robert Clifden or to me.”

Rosa’s head was now turned, but Lady Isabella *would* see her face.

“ I am right,” she said.

“ But is it never right to make sacrifices ? ” asked Rosa, “ more especially for the sake of those to whom we are not only bound by

every tie of gratitude, but whom we love dearly."

"I am not much skilled in casuistry, Rosa, but surely a sacrifice ought to bear some proportion to the object for which it is made. You would sacrifice to me not only your own whole life and happiness, but those of Robert Clifden, and all the good you might effect through him and what you might do for him. Rosa, you have taught me something, and now I would teach you. I do not love you the less but the more because you have wished to make this sacrifice, because I see in you something of what I was once myself. Now listen to me. My tale shall be brief.

Without speaking, Rosa turned eagerly towards her friend. She had often desired to know her history, and never had she felt her interest in it stronger than at this moment. Lady Isabella commenced :

"When I was a girl of eighteen or nineteen years old, I was excessively romantic. I had

been educated in seclusion and except one or two flying visits to London and Edinburgh, had spent my whole life at Peatmuir Castle in Rosshire. I have not seen Peatmuir for years, but it is a wild, Highland place, situated in a heathy park in the midst of lofty mountains and surrounded by pine woods, in a district full of legends and superstitions with which my early years were abundantly nourished. As I grew older, I indulged in an almost unlimited perusal of imaginative works, more especially poetry. The poetry of feeling rather than action chiefly attracted me. I never possessed the love of adventure, the desire for novelty and thirst after foreign scenes which I have heard some describe, but I longed for a kindred heart and mind, I desired some one, a friend or a lover to whom I might devote myself, for whom I might live or die, if necessary. No one I think had any idea of my feelings—none at least of their depth and passion. The few who knew me, thought me, I believe, an amiable, good-tempered, rather

moon-stricken girl, somewhat indolent and inactive for a Highland lassie. My father, though a kind and indulgent parent, was a matter-of-fact, business man, with the feelings and tastes of his rank and country. My mother was dead. From her I inherited two or three thousand pounds—at that time, my sole portion—as my father was too poor to be able to save anything for me out of the estate which devolved with the title on my only brother. He was therefore naturally desirous to see me suitably settled in life, an event which he did not deem improbable, as my birth, connections, and appearance, might be supposed to counterbalance my want of fortune. Although I have but scanty remains of good looks now, in those days, I believe, I was pretty, and piqued myself most of all, on an air of high-breeding and refinement.

“It was when I was about nineteen, that for the first time for some years we had neighbours at Peatmuir. Dunburch Castle was let to Lord Easthampton, a wealthy English nobleman, who

came down for the shooting season with a large party of guests. Among these was Sir Frederick Whitton, a young baronet of good family and very large fortune. At the constant pic-nics and parties which were the consequence of this visit, he appeared to single me out as the object of his attention. But as by no word or look, by nothing in fact but bestowing on me the chief share of his society, did he behave to me otherwise than to any other person, it never once struck me that he was my lover.

“Besides, as he was the last person in the world I should have fancied for a lover, I never thought about him at all. He was a tall, heavily made, stupid, good-natured fellow, whose company was rather tiresome to me than otherwise. He had been at Dunburch about three weeks, when he was suddenly called home by the dangerous illness of his mother. I was surprised to find that my father seemed much chagrined by this event, but on the afternoon of the day on which we first had the news, Heatherbrae (my brother) had a note from Sir Frederick, begging to

thank my father for his hospitality, and to offer his adieux and compliments to us all, expressing also great regret at leaving the neighbourhood, and assuring us that as soon as duty would permit, he should find his way back to the north.

"I was quite surprised at the satisfaction this note and promise appeared to cause my father and brother, and wondered what they could see in Sir Frederick Whitton to admire so much.

"Sir Frederick's place at Dunbircb was filled in a few days, by a new guest—Mr. Robert Conway."

Rosa looked up eagerly, with even additional interest in her face.

"Yes, Rosa — the father of Robert Conway Clifden. In personal appearance, Mr. Clifden is not to be compared with his father. Yet he is not unlike him, but the likeness is that of a diminished shadow. Rather above the middle height, full of life and vigour, with darker eyes, darker hair, a more blooming cheek, more of the fire and animation of youth had Robert Conway, than I should suppose his son

ever possessed, even before he lost his sight. He had much less the air of a student, and more that of a man of the world—I mean, in the good sense of that phrase. Intelligent he was also, fond of adventure, and devoted to poetry at that time. Like his predecessor, Sir Frederick Whitton, he also seemed attracted to me, but our conversation was not long confined to commonplaces. I beheld, in Robert Conway the most interesting person I had yet seen, and it was not long ere he insinuated that to him I appeared in a similar light. Rosa, my life at that time was a life of ecstasy. I seemed to tread on air, to breathe the atmosphere of fairy land, to taste the joy of perfect sympathy. Time hardly existed for me. One feeling swallowed up all ideas. To do something for the sake of Robert Conway was my only ambition. I can hardly tell you how long we had been acquainted when we plighted our troth to each other. I know it was not long, but ever since: that time has seemed to me as it were wrapped in a golden mist, which has rendered all distinct ideas about it impossible.

“When I announced my engagement to my father, I never saw a man so much disconcerted. He was even angry, which was an unusual thing with him, as he was very amiable. He replied that he would not consent to our engagement, till he was satisfied that Mr. Conway could make a suitable settlement upon me. Robert Conway, my Robert, as I then called him, referred Lord Peatmuir to his father. The elder Mr. Conway was a gentleman of good family, but of somewhat impoverished estate. Any settlement that he could make on his son, or his son’s wife, would be very inadequate to the rank and position of either. At the time, I did not know the details of the correspondence between our respective parents, but I have since heard its purport from my brother. It was, it seems, extremely amicable. Lord Peatmuir and Mr. Conway were perfectly agreed that the greatest kindness they could do their children was to break off the engagement they had so imprudently contracted. It seemed that Robert

had been destined for many years to be the husband of an heiress—a Miss Clifden, who, besides a large fortune, would bring him a seat in parliament, and open a career for his promising talents. In short, it was agreed between the two gentlemen, wiser than many parents in such circumstances, that though they would both withhold their consent on the plea of mutual poverty, gentle means rather than violence should be used to sever us. It was first represented to us that as our marriage was quite impossible for an indefinite time, an engagement was wrong and foolish. We replied that as our hearts were engaged for ever, a verbal engagement could never be felt by us as a burden. We yielded it up, however, with mutual assurances and mutual faith, that it was of no consequence. It was then agreed that we should not meet for two years, but we both positively refused to forego correspondence in the interval. Robert then quitted the Highlands and shortly afterwards was sent to travel in America by his father.

“We corresponded regularly for more than a year. After a time his letters became less frequent, but they were not shorter, nor was their tone less sincere. No, never for a moment did he give me cause to suppose that he wished to forsake me, but I saw with regret that the world was brushing away that romantic and poetic ardour which I so much admired. And I have sometimes suspected since, that part of it was not quite natural to Robert Conway, but had been caught from me.

“As soon as he returned home, he wrote me that he had entered on the study of politics and law. I did not like such studies for him, why I hardly knew, but I had an instinctive fear that they might weaken my influence, and I had heard others say that Robert Conway was ambitious. The two years now drew to a close. One day my father took me into the library to have a private conversation. He asked me if I still persevered in my juvenile attachment. I assured him that I did and that Robert Conway did the same.

“‘Isabella,’ said my father, ‘will you listen to a few reasonable words from one who can have no object but your interest.’

“Of course I answered in the affirmative, and my father continued :

“‘I have had a very sensible letter from the elder Mr. Conway on the subject. If you and Mr. Robert Conway persist in your imprudent attachment, there is no chance of your being married for years, if ever, and most probably poverty and all its consequent trials will be your fate through life. You blight not only your own prospects but those of the man you say you love.’

“‘Show me how I do so,’ I cried, and I will make any sacrifice.”

“My father saw he had struck the right chord. He then told me of Robert’s intended marriage with Miss Clifden, and how it had long been arranged between the families, that she was young and handsome and amiable, and that his union with her would open up the career suited to his

talents—a career which I knew myself he longed to enter on, though to me he had never once mentioned the existence of Miss Clifden. It seemed that the young lady had been abroad for some years, but that her mother, who was very anxious for the marriage, as the late Mrs. Conway had been her most intimate friend, had written to Robert's father that she believed all was right on her daughter's side. The question therefore was, would I ruin Robert's prospects for life by encouraging an engagement with myself which might never terminate, and shut him out from a marriage in every respect calculated to make him happy. If I really loved him now was the time to show it.

“Rosa, my father's words threw me into an agony. Now I see the sophistry of his reasoning, though, to do him justice, his expostulation contained only what the world would have called common sense, and with a nature different from mine, perhaps different consequences might have resulted. To give up Robert was

terrible, yet the idea of sacrificing myself for him was fascinating to my imagination, and the more I dwelt upon it the more fascinating it became. Alas! Rosa, I did not know then that the courage to make a great sacrifice is as nothing compared with the fortitude required to support its consequences. I requested a day to consider and then I informed my father that if Robert Conway would consent I would give up for his sake what nothing in the world would have induced me to give up for my own. I wished to write myself, but this my father would not permit. He wrote to Mr. Conway himself.

“As early as an answer could have been received, a large packet arrived for me. It contained my own letters, with a note, every word of which I can even yet recollect.

“‘The intelligence I have just received from my father regarding your decision, has been the heaviest disappointment of my life, but I do not reproach you, for I feel that, situated as I am, I ought perhaps never to have addressed you.

Isabella, I could not meet you again. Farewell.
May you be happy !'

" This letter almost drove me to distraction. Whether it was written in acquiescence or in pique I could not determine, but I think in pique, though time and distance I doubt not, brought acquiescence likewise. For some time, Rosa, I strove to support myself with the consciousness of the sacrifice I had made, but it would not do. My anguish increased daily and a long and severe illness ensued. From this I recovered, but regained neither my health nor spirits. At this time Sir Frederick Whitton renewed his addresses, but to my father's chagrin was rejected. He was, however, too right-thinking and conscientious a man to press a marriage distasteful to me. Time passed on and it was a great consolation to me that Robert did not marry. I know not what wild and visionary hopes I built on this circumstance. But these were destined to be overthrown. About a year and a half after the receipt of his last letter I saw his marriage announced in the papers !

“This was for what I had given him up ; and when not very long afterwards I heard also of his being returned member of Parliament for ———, and read in the papers his manly and sensible speech (I must confess, not so eloquent as his son’s), I tried to support myself with the idea that my sacrifice had not been in vain, that through my renunciation Robert Conway had obtained fortune, fame, and happiness.

“I would not allow myself to believe that I was wretched, and that my life was blank, forsaken, and lonely. I acted to myself a falsehood, though vague gleams of the truth occasionally broke through the mists of illusion. At last it was entirely dispelled, and nothing was left me but the bitter regret, which ever since has poisoned my happiness and paralysed my life.

“At my mother’s marriage all her fortune, present and prospective, was settled on her younger children. At the death of her father, it was found, however, that all her possessions

consisted of two or three thousand pounds, and this was all I had to depend on. A very wealthy relative she had in India, but as he had two children no expectations were entertained from that quarter. But an epidemic suddenly swept off the father and both his children, and his property fell to me and another cousin. This occurred only about six months after the marriage of Robert Conway. The event which my father hoped would have consoled me, prostrated me completely. Had I remained firm, had I remained true, it was I who could have given with my love, fortune and fame to Robert Conway!

“Night and day was I haunted by this un-availing regret. It deprived me of all power of endurance, of all hope, all energy. I fell into a state of melancholy from which I was only roused by the illness and death of my father—an event which by removing from me the only person I loved, deprived me of the sole stimulus to exertion which yet remained to me.

"After my father's death I removed to Highriggs, not that I should have had energy to make any change, had I not felt that in a house of my own only, could I indulge as I wished my horror of society, and the silence and melancholy which were my only enjoyment, if I may use the term. There, Rosa, I have remained nearly a life-time in the state of mind and body in which you found me. To you, my good child, under the Almighty, I owe my restoration to life, and my insight into its real meaning and purpose. To you I owe my only solid hope of a better. It was long ere I received the lesson, but the truth has been gradually ripening in my mind. I fear that I have entered the vineyard at the eleventh hour, but I will spend no more regrets even over my own selfish sorrow and sinful sloth. I humbly believe I am pardoned, and that He who works in me both to will and to do, will, while the day lasts, help me to labour yet, ere 'the night

cometh.' I shall miss you, Rosa, but I shall not be alone."

Tears stood in Lady Isabella's eyes, but her pale face was full of resolution. Rosa's heart felt ready to burst with the variety of her emotions. She could not speak. After they both became calmer, Lady Isabella continued, with a faint smile,

"Rosa, I know if you were to make a sacrifice, you would not sink under it as I did, your strong faith and your nobler spirit would bear you above it—whatever you did, even if it were wrongly done, you would learn from it and turn it to a good account; but remember, far more even than I did, you would now sacrifice another as well as yourself. Much as I shall grieve to part with you, I would not for all the world contains permit you so to act for my sake." She paused, and then added, half in soliloquy,

"No, I will give to the son something far better than that which I took from the father."

A light flashed upon Rosa's mind. She saw

that Lady Isabella was still the same that her history had painted her—the same at least in one sense. She still loved to devote herself to those who were dear to her. Though more enlightened and more judicious, she was almost as romantic at fifty as she had been at nineteen.

But there is a kind of romance, which only worldly and little minds would ever wish to see extinguished.

Rosa threw her arms round her friend's neck. The latter strained her to her bosom in a close embrace, saying as she kissed her repeatedly,

“My child ! if I make any sacrifice now, I know it is one which I shall never repent, for it is right.”

CHAPTER IX.

LADY Isabella rang for tea.

"If you please, my lady," said Helen, as she brought in the tray, "Nelly would like to speak to you and Miss Grey, if you are at liberty."

Lady Isabella having replied in the affirmative, Nelly made her appearance in the course of a few seconds. Her hard, sensible face looked unusually perturbed, and her keen, dark eye shone out from her swarthy countenance

with a more uncertain light than was common with its usual decided glance. Her manner too betrayed a certain doubt and disturbance very foreign to it.

"If ye please, my leddy," she began, and hesitated.

"What is the matter, Nelly? Can I—can either of us help you?"

Nelly turned to Rosa—

"Miss Rosa kens about it. Ye see, Miss Rosa, I gaed doon to the seeking woman ye telled me o', wi' the drap broth, and wha sud she be, Miss Rosa, but my gudemither!" Nelly drew a long breath after having made this announcement, and waited as if for a reply. But ere she answered Rosa looked at Nelly's face; but nothing could she gather from that of her feelings, except that they were moved in some way or other, but whether by compassion, by surprise, or resentment, she could not guess. She asked:

"Did she recognise you?"

"No, hinny, she didna. I keep't mysel oot o' sicht. No' that she wad ha' kenned me tho' I think, for she was oot o' her judgment, the kind a' way folk are that drink."

Nelly certainly did not speak in the same tone of asperity with which she used to allude to her step-mother, so that Rosa enquired,

"What are you going to do, Nelly? It must have been a shock to you to see her reduced to so terrible a state."

Nelly looked anxiously round the room as if she suspected some one of being concealed about it, then she carefully fastened the door and muttered something about the "lassie Ealin," having, "lang lugs." The real truth was, Nelly for the first time in her life was going to confess a fault to a fellow creature, but her humility was not yet at any rate sufficiently great to permit Helen, whom she had so often reproved as a superior, to witness this confession.

"Weel, Miss Rosa, it *was* an awfu' sicht. I

haena got ower 't. I mind when I used to wish she was as meeserable as she had made me, and it seemed like a judgment on me as weel as her to see her sae muckle waur. Hech sirse! Miss Rosa, ane disna need to wish ill to the wicked, for what is wickedness but the warst o' ills itsel! Aye, Miss Rosa? Thanks to you, hinny, and thanks to the saint that is gane; under Him wha is abune a' I ken a hantel o' things I didna ken aince. I see now what ministers and the Bible means aboot the heart being deceitful abune a' things, and desperately wicked. I used to think mysel as gude as ither folk, and may bes I am, as some, but I ken now *that* can be nae plea i' the great and terrible day o' the Lord. Na, na, we're a' alike i' the sicht o' Him wha is perfect excep we ha' pit on the waddin garment o' the Redeemer's righteousness—a' alike, yon awfu' woman and me. Aye! *He* has forgien me mair nor I hae to forgie her."

"Dear Nelly," cried Rosa, with tears in her eyes, and taking her old friend's hand, "how

glad I am to hear you speak so. It takes a weight from my mind."

"I ha thout so for some time, Miss Rosa, but or the day I fancy I was ower prood to say sae. But what sud I do, ma'am, aboot this woman?"

"What do you think of doing, Nelly?" asked Lady Isabella, who had been an interested listener to what had passed.

"I maun keep her for naething as lang as she lives," answered Nelly, who had in fact made up her mind what she was going to do, and in asking advice from her two auditors, sought in fact the comfort of their approbation, rather than wished their counsel.

"Oh no, Nelly," cried Lady Isabella, "I have taken her maintenance upon myself. You can nurse her if you like."

"Na, mem, begging your leddyship's pardon. It was a' very weel for you to mainteen her, as lang as there was naebody that was sic like to her, and as to nursing her, I'm no sae sure o'

that. She hates me like puzzen, and aiblins gin I were to gang till nurse her, it might be mair like vengence nor forgiveness. Na, mem, it wad ne'er do for me to be the arie to keep the drink frae her, but I'll pay the doctor and the lodging, and the nurse, and what mair she needs."

"But are you sure you can afford this, Nelly?" asked Lady Isabella, surprised not only at Nelly's magnanimity, but at her wonderful insight into her own motives as well as the feelings of others.

"I dinna ken what it would cost, mem, but I think I hae aneuch i' the bank. I hae been a carefu' woman, my leddy, ower carefu' may be. It was laid up for my auld age. I may never live to be auld. But gin I do, I maun trust to him that careth for me. A hantel o' folk says that mem, wha dinna meand'—aince I thout naebody meant it, an' it was only a silly way o' speaking, but praise be till *His* name, I ken better now."

Neither Lady Isabella nor Rosa returned any answer. Both were struck with respect and admiration for the sincerity of Nelly—that truthfulness of character, which had hitherto prevented her feigning, or deceiving herself into the belief that she had attained to a faith beyond her, and which was now the best guarantee that that faith was genuine. Nelly was that rare and admirable character, between whose creed and whose actions there is no discrepancy—not more at least than is inseparable from the imperfection of our nature,

Nelly was on the point of leaving the room, when Lady Isabella asked her if she knew that they were about to lose Miss Grey. Nelly seemed much struck, and even shed tears. She expressed, however, her approbation of Rosa's decision.

“I’m wae to part wi’ ye, hinny, but yon broken down woman and yon puir lad! Eh, Miss Rosa! I little thout the young gentleman wad ha’ been like that, wae’s me, but I wad ha’

dune as ye do—aye—I wad ha' dune that at ony time. I will miss ye, Miss Rosa dear, but I ken ye wunna forget auld Nelly."

Rosa wrung Nelly's hand, and the latter wiped her eyes, saying sadly,

"Aye, this has been a pleesant time—but a' things maun come to an end. Thank ye, my Leddy for a' yer favours. Will ye let the lassie Ealen come to see me whiles."

"Do you want to leave me, Nelly?" asked Lady Isabella. Nelly's eyes shone wide and bright,

"Want to leave ye, my Leddy, no mem, that I do not; but;" and Nelly hesitated. Nelly rarely hesitated or felt bashful except when she suspected some one of feeling a regard for her.

"Because, Nelly, if you are comfortable with me, and are fond of Helen, I think I can offer you a place, not only that would suit you but where it would be a great comfort to me to have you."

Nelly's eyes glistened, but she only curtsied awkwardly.

"I have been a long time in want of a good laundress. There is a comfortable little cottage in my grounds at present unoccupied, where you shall live and get up my washings, and where you can see Helen whenever you like, and myself often, too, I hope."

"Oh, mem ! my leddy, ye are far ower gude ; but ye shall hae the bonniest table cloths and the clearest muslins o'ony leddy i'braid Scotland, be the other wha she likes, though I say it wha shouldna say it. And, maybe Miss Rosa will be comin' to visit ye whiles."

"I hope so, Nelly," said both Rosa and Lady Isabella in a breath : the latter then continued,

"But you have not asked what your wages are to be."

"Ony thing yer leddyship likes."

Lady Isabella named a sum, ample but not extravagant. To Nelly, however, who had pinched and screwed all her life, its magnitude seemed amazing. She even, as she thought herself in conscience bound, made an attempt at remonstrance,

but her scruples were overruled by Lady Isabella assuring her she should have given the same to any laundress she might have engaged ; and as Nelly, as we have seen, thought herself as competent as any other laundress in the world, and was resolved to strain every nerve to do her best, she said no more, but submitted to her high fortune with mingled dignity and humility

* * * *

It was a beautiful afternoon in the early autumn, that Mrs. Clifden's carriage stopped in front of the great entrance to Riversthaite Hall. The slanting rays of the sun—now declining in the blue September sky—streamed on the giant woods of elm and ash, just touched with the coming glory of autumn. The dry leaves danced and rustled in the fresh evening breeze, while the soft rolling note of the wood-pigeon added melody to beauty. But though the scene was bright, to Rosa its prevailing tone was melancholy. The very beauty of the woods contained a prophecy of decay ; the autumnal sunshine was like a

smile on the countenance of a dying friend, and the mellow voice of the wood-pigeon was sweet and sad as the farewell tones of the beloved.

As the footman let down the steps of the carriage, and Watkins threw open the hall door with an air in which stateliness struggled with depression, Rosa was the first to descend from the carriage. Watkins bowed low when he saw her, and said in a voice which he struggled to render steady,

“Miss Grey, your servant, Miss! May I presume to say you are welcome home?”

Rosa shook hands with Watkins who had advanced to the door of the carriage to help out his master and mistress. Robert was the next to descend, but it was Rosa's hand on which he leant.

“At home!” he said. “It is a fine afternoon, and the sun shines, does it not, Rosa?”

Rosa replied to him in the affirmative, describing the general aspect of things in a few brief words.

"Thank you," he said. "I see it all in your words, as you see it in nature. You have the poet's gift of transferring to another mind the impressions you receive."

Rosa, Watkins, and Mrs. Clifden's maid, now transferred that unfortunate lady from the carriage into a wheeled chair, during which operation she scolded all three. It was wonderful to see how Watkins preserved throughout the old air of profound reverence, while Rosa tried by submission and cheerfulness to coax Mrs. Clifden back to good-humour, but in vain.

"I won't be spoken to like a baby, Miss Grey. I would have you know I am the mistress of my own house, and though I have taken you back, you must not forget your place here. Watkins, remember you obey nobody's orders but my own and my nephew's."

"Certainly, Madam!" said Watkins reverentially, but without raising his eyes, while Robert's face was turned imploringly to Rosa. She took the first moment to whisper ;

"I do not mind, Robert. I know it is disease."

In a few days, the family at Riversthrwaite had settled down to their ordinary occupations. As the routine of one day was for the most part precisely like that of another, I shall describe it once for all. Mrs. Clifden never rose till after luncheon, so that Robert and Rosa had the whole morning to themselves. Not long after her arrival, Rosa had discovered that sometime previous to his loss of sight, Robert had commenced a work, historical, critical, and philosophical, on the Church in the Middle Ages.

When he had first begun reading on the subject, he told her it was not with any intention of writing, but rather with the view of making himself master of any matter which might give him correct views of ecclesiastical affairs, and qualify him, when he should be in parliament to take an intelligent and just part in what had always seemed to him one of the most important branches of legislation—the

position, powers, and duties of the church. Convinced as he had always been, even before the saving and supporting power of an earnest faith in the peculiar doctrines of the Cross had become a matter of personal experience, that the growth of an enlightened morality is the only reliable source for national, as for individual reform, and that no such morality can exist without the sanction of higher motives than can belong to this world only, he thought it of the very utmost importance that the Guide and Teacher of that greater sanction should herself be placed where her lessons were most likely to be efficacious, and where she was herself most likely to be preserved from corruption. But as Robert read, new views of ecclesiastical history, and ecclesiastical influence in past times, broke upon his mind—times, which he thought had never been fairly represented, and which, if rightly comprehended, must go far to enlighten the public, and prepare it for the consideration of wise and just measures. The strong desire

too which inspires almost all who have anything to say, to say it, took hold of him. There was a weight on his mind which utterance alone could remove, and with eagerness he commenced his arduous but grateful task. How it was stopped the reader knows. He could, it is true, have found an amanuensis, but in the morbid depression he had described to Rosa as the first consequence of his hopeless deprivation, the reserved Robert Clifden shrank from betraying to an unsympathising hireling the workings of his fastidious and pure, though somewhat haughty mind. And even could he have submitted to employ an amanuensis, he had no one who could understand what to read to him, or help him to select. Afterwards, when the great change came over his mind, he had been so engrossed by other thoughts that his book for the time was forgotten. But lately the desire to write had returned with even added force, and he had for some time been devising means for procuring the necessary assistance.

All these desires and difficulties Robert now confided to Rosa, asking her advice. At once she offered, as far as her own acquirements would permit, to become his reader and his help, and always his amanuensis.

“You might have a much more learned assistant, Robert, but I do not think you would have a more zealous one; and I think, if you are not in great haste I might increase my learning; you used to say I was not stupid.”

“Rosa—Rosa—how can I thank you, or how can I permit this sacrifice of your whole leisure to me!”

“Indeed, Robert, it will be no sacrifice in any sense. It will be a source of great profit and more pleasure than I can tell you.”

Much more Rosa could have said, for her heart was indeed filled with delight. But as she thought, more was unnecessary. The generous always understand generosity.

Every morning, reading or writing, or ordering the necessary books, which were sometimes

procured at great trouble and expense, was the employment of these two young persons, both deeply in earnest, and unremittingly industrious. The work of course could not be finished without the aid of volumes and manuscripts, which could be procured in public libraries alone, and Robert now even meditated a visit to some of the most celebrated collections. Things which had formerly, in the depressed state of his spirits, seemed impossible, appeared now quite practicable. Though he felt still that the work could never be written without Rosa—that with the spirit of the whole she only could sympathise—still, in the mere details, in the preparatory parts, he could recognise the efficacy of other aid. It was astonishing to see how, under the influence of congenial occupation, companionship, and hope, Robert's health improved. His face, though still pale, lost its sickliness, and his frame its languor. His tone was generally cheerful, and sometimes even lively. Rosa, too, was happy. Engrossing occupation, the con-

sciousness of having bestowed happiness on Robert Clifden, of filling a useful though a humble place in life, gave her a satisfaction she had never before experienced, and made all the tediousness of confinement to Mrs. Clifden's room, and the querulousness of that unfortunate lady easily borne. Yet in time Rosa discovered that if her services were received as a right and excited no gratitude in her aunt, they were in a manner appreciated, for no one could arrange her pillows, read to her, or mix her arrow-root to please her, as well as Rosa. She would have left the poor girl no time for exercise had Robert not insisted on it. He of course was her companion in her walks and drives ; and as on the day of their arrival at Riversthwaite, she described to him the varied aspect of the sky and its effect on the scenery.

"Rosa," he said one day, "I think I see beauties with your eyes I should not have seen with my own."

But Robert was not in the habit of making

grateful speeches to Rosa, or of *making speeches*, as it is called, at all. After the first few days the kindness and assistance were received as a matter of course—were asked even, with that confidence in her affection and desire to aid which only near relationship, or the very closest friendship, bestows. No profession was ever made by either of them, hardly any demonstration of friendship, except what was testified by the whole course of their daily lives.

Rosa was satisfied that the love Robert Clifden had felt for her was now calmed into friendship—friendship the sincerest and the most lasting—and she said to herself it was better. For some years she had striven as a religious duty to divest herself of that eager anxiety for, and interest in, the future, which is one of the besetting sins of imaginative minds, and to leave hers in the hands of Him who pities us as a father pities his own children. Past experience and present occupation made this easier than it had ever been before.

So passed the time to the inmates of Rivers-thwaite, quickly and cheerfully, and not as under their circumstances the world in general supposed it must pass, gloomily and tediously. The sunshine of life comes after all from within.

But I have in a great measure anticipated the proper course of my narrative, and must ask my reader to return with me again to a period shortly after the return of Rosa Grey to Rivers-thwaite.

CHAPTER X.

AMONG the first visitors to Riversthwaite to welcome the return of Mrs. Clifden and her nephew, were Mr. and Mrs. Wills. With them came Fanny, partly out of curiosity, and partly out of a lingering affection for Rosa. She arrived in a state of feeling nicely balanced between these two emotions. Robert and Rosa were both with Mrs. Clifden when the party arrived. She had been unusually fretful and fussy all the morning.

"Are you able to see people, my dear aunt," asked Robert; "Rosa, I am sure, would do all that is necessary."

"Able! of course, Robert, I am able—I am not so weak and old and stupid as you suppose. Rosa is not mistress here, whatever you and she may suppose. I took her back to read to you, and—oh, my poor boy!" she broke off, as a recollection of his blindness flashed across her; "it is my greatest trial—Rosa, you may come if you like, and see your old friend Fanny; but you are not to presume—I am mistress here."

Robert and Rosa followed Mrs. Clifden's chair as she was wheeled from her own room, which was now on the ground-floor, into the drawing-room. Mr. Wills rose on their entrance, and made his usual pompous, half-military bow to Mrs. Clifden. He did not look much older than when Rosa had last seen him. His hair was a little thinner and with all the art possible would not now cover his forehead, which looked higher, shinier, and emptier than

ever. He shook hands with Robert Clifden with great cordiality, while to Rosa he merely made the slightest mark of recognition. Fanny, however, kissed her with some outward demonstration of affection, though her manner was doubtful and constrained. Fanny was more changed than her brother. All appearance of youth had left her utterly. She looked shrunken, pale, and withered. Her nose had become very sharp, and a little red, there were black spots on her front teeth, and her head on the top was almost bald. Her countenance, too, was more careworn and dissatisfied, while her quick and frisky movements were without the youthful charm of gay spirits, which had atoned for their want of dignity. She, not Mr. Wills, introduced her sister-in-law. The latter bowed to Rosa *de haut en bas*, that is to say, if the figure may be used to express the manner of one who literally *did* the very reverse.

Mrs. Wills was a very little woman, pale-complexioned, more fashionable than lady-like, and

evidently piquing herself on the gentility of herself and her acquaintance. She did not look, however, at all bad-tempered or ill-natured, only very silly. She spoke with a lisp, and seemed either to feel or to affect a profound veneration for her husband. Indeed, they were a very well-matched pair. She conversed chiefly with Mrs. Clifden, if conversation it could be called which consisted in querulous remarks, and cross interrogations on the part of the latter, and frightened, foolish answers on the part of Mrs. Wills, to whom the dignity of being the sole object of Mrs. Clifden's attention hardly atoned for the discomfort.

Robert, in the meantime, chatted with Mr. Wills about the weather and the state of the crops, and even listened with placid resignation to an account of the nature and effects of blight in wheat. Fanny was thus left to Rosa. She spoke on apparently in her usual voluble and confidential fashion, and even with a display of friendship, but there was a real constraint in

her manner, and an unnaturalness in her tone, of which Rosa could not fail to be conscious. She was also instinctively aware that it was the aim of her quondam friend to vex and dazzle her. Speaking in a low, confidential tone, and glancing from beneath her eyelids at her sister-in-law, she said,

“Is she not an exquisite creature? The very person for my brother; they are so happy.”

If they were happy, poor Fanny did not, however, seem so herself, for, even as she spoke, tears started to her eyes, and her tones had an accent of sadness. Rosa felt her heart melted, and wondering if she regretted former hopes, would have embraced her affectionately for the sake of the time and the kindness which had given birth to them. But Fanny's next words entirely repressed the compassionate impulse. Fanny had evidently no idea of Rosa's kind feelings towards her, she had only a bitter sense of her own kindness having been despised, and an angry feeling that Rosa, without the shadow of a right,

had thought herself better than her brother, and too good for *her* sister-in-law.

"Have you seen anything of the Blakeney's since your return?" she inquired.

"Nothing whatever."

"Dear me! I wonder Mrs. Blakeney did not call on you; but she is the most upsetting creature, gives herself such airs—not, however, but what there are many people who object to calling on persons who have no ascertained position, even my sister-in-law has that opinion, and makes it a rule not to do so, though of course for my sake, she makes an exception. It is such an advantage to have a position—any position—the humblest, as Mrs. Wills said yesterday, is better than a sort of thing one does not know what to make of. Poor Harold Blakeney is the most dreadfully henpecked husband that ever existed—you would hardly know him. I am sure if you were to see him, it would cure you, if you had any regret, though to be sure, a home and a position are something in themselves to have missed."

"They are something," said Rosa, "and yet, Fanny, they are nothing, unless they are bestowed by a warm heart and a constant mind."

Fanny looked a little softened. She was by no means incapable of understanding a generous sentiment, though her faith in the personal influence of such was well-nigh dead. She looked in Rosa's fresh, beautiful, kind face and felt a slight pang of remorse and a misgiving as to the justice of her own resentment. She continued in a manner more friendly and evidently with some little wish to gratify her listener.

"Old Mrs. Blakeney very seldom comes here. They say she and her daughter-in-law fight like cat and dog. The fact of the matter is, they are both too fond of playing first fiddle. Mrs. Harold is not at all liked in the parish, she is so fond of interfering with everything and every body, and she never gets a servant to stay with her longer than a couple of months. She has quarrelled with two schoolmistresses, and the schoolmaster cannot endure the sight of her."

"Is she a clever person?" enquired Rosa somewhat curious.

"Oh yes, very clever—not in your way, though; but she is a splendid manager, the house and the garden, and the children, are perfect patterns of order. They say the children—poor little things—are desperately afraid of their mother, and that Harold himself often helps them to hide their little misdemeanours from her. He is very fond of them, and very fond of playing with them, and he has plenty of time, for his wife does all his duty as well as her own."

Rosa saw it all, and without a shade either of regret or resentment remaining, could pity her weak-minded, faithless lover. She wondered if Mrs. Blakeney had discovered that to find a person at once fond of managing and willing to be managed, is a difficult task; or if it were possible that that infallible lady could own to having made a mistake.

Having exhausted the Blakeney's, and having naturally a considerable share of curiosity, Fanny commenced another subject.

"So you have left Lady Isabella Mac Whin after all. From the account I have heard of her, she must be a dreadful person to live with."

"Oh no, not at all," cried Rosa warmly, in her gratitude for her affection and kindness almost totally forgetting her foibles. "She is the kindest and the dearest friend I ever had. I should have been glad to live with her always."

The sharp, incredulous, offended expression returned to Fanny's features. She suspected Rosa of affectation, of parading Lady Isabella's regard for her, and of a wish to magnify her own consequence and the number of her friends.

"Dear me! What in the world then could have made you leave her to come back to this dismal place?"

"Perhaps," said Rosa, in the eager impulse of her natural ardour, forgetting that she might not be understood! "perhaps I ought not to have said my dearest friend. I have one here who has at least an equal claim on my gratitude, and two who have a greater, both on my duty and compassion."

"And," said Fanny doubtfully, "did you really quit a comfortable home and a kind friend out of compassion and duty?"

"No, no," cried Rosa; "I should deceive myself and you, if I said so for a moment. I can easily suppose that my life here to others appears gloomy, but it is not so. I have the happiness of feeling that my time and thoughts are devoted to the service of one to whom they are of great importance, and who feels and appreciates all I do. I know my life and my friendship are not bestowed in vain, and this is to me unspeakable happiness." The words were hardly out of Rosa's mouth ere she almost repented the impulse which had forced her to utter them. But she needed not. Fanny, as I have said, had naturally a comprehension of generous sentiments and those of devotion for affection's sake were to her the most comprehensible, more especially the kind of devotion she fancied Rosa's to be. Warmly she echoed the last sentiment, but with a deep sigh.

"It is indeed unspeakable happiness." Then turning away her face to hide her tears from the rest of the party, she drew Rosa into a window and embracing her, she said :

"You were always better than anybody else in the world. I wish I were like you, but I am a poor, useless, old maid that nobody will ever care for."

"Dear Fanny ! do not say so. I am sure I care for you. I am so glad, dear Fanny, you are not offended with me."

"It is all because I was so fond of you, Rosa, and had set my heart on—but I was born to be disappointed in every thing."

"We have all our disappointments and trials, dear Fanny—"

"I know—I know you have had yours too, but it seems so different with you. I am made quite differently from you, and yet what a light-hearted, merry creature I was once, far merrier than you ever were. I remember an old admirer of mine (poor fellow ! he went to Austr-

lia and died, or I have no doubt we should have been married) used to say, my face was like a beam of sunshine."

Poor Fanny's face as she spoke looked like anything rather than a beam of sunshine. Rosa's heart felt sad, as she reflected that the thoughtfulness which disappointment had brought to the light-hearted, volatile Fanny Wills had been attended with no wisdom. The atmosphere of this world had so surrounded her life; its maxims, its laws, its hopes, its fears, its likings and its dislikings, had so interpenetrated her nature, as to close all avenues to higher things, and to unfit the soil of a heart naturally generous for the growth of purer aspirations and holier affections. Thought, with her, had exasperated rather than healed the wounds which disappointment had made.

After rather a prolonged visit Mrs. Wills took leave, condescendingly remarking to Rosa that she hoped she would come to see Fanny.

After they were gone, Rosa remained for

some little time thinking over all she had heard from Fanny Wills. It seemed to her that all had turned out so naturally. She could easily fancy Harold Blakeney what Fanny had painted him, and even while a feeling of sadness was mingled with her mirth, she laughed as she thought of the self-laid trap into which the elder Mrs. Blakeney had fallen. Her deeper feelings were those of boundless gratitude.

She felt that to minister, unknown and despised, to the destiny of the blind invalid was far higher honour, and truer and nobler usefulness than to be the important wife of Harold Blakeney with "a position," and a parish in which she could bustle about in all the dignity of one "clothed in a little brief authority."

CHAPTER XI.

ROSA had been between two and three years at Riversthaite. Those years had been to all appearance as unbroken in their monotony as the years she had spent at Highriggs, but in the inward life their complexion had been very different. At Highriggs, her mind had lain as a seed does in the earth, not, it is true, without progress, but in darkness and stillness, giving no visible indication of its advancement. Here it had been cultivated by a severer study, stimu-

lated by a purer ambition than any she had previously known, while its powers of understanding had been sharpened and developed by close communication with a more powerful, more extensively cultivated, though not more comprehensive, or more candid mind than her own. The somewhat anomalous fact too, of this stronger and richer intellect being unable to receive anything except through hers, had, as it were, forced her own faculties into the fullest blossom, and under the sunshine of strong affection they had bloomed into fragrance and beauty, undreamt of till then even by Robert Clifden.

The first volume of Robert's work was finished, and all written out, in Rosa's own handwriting. It was published by an eminent firm, and the reputation Robert had already made by his very brief public career, which was not yet quite forgotten, procured him a ready audience. The press and the public at once acknowledged the soundness of the work, its originality and its eloquence. It was the most successful book

which had issued from the press for many years. Sweetly to the ears of the recluse students of Riversthwaite, came the tones of praise from the noisy world. Robert felt that his life needed no longer to be useless, and Rosa had perhaps a still deeper joy.

Robert's face wore the crimson flush and his sightless eyes were suffused with the moisture which were in him indications of the very deepest feeling, as he said,

"Rosa, I owe all this to you."

"Only in one sense," she answered, weeping, for her heart was full.

"In every sense, Rosa. Till I knew you, my mind was like a heap of dead fuel. If it burns now into light and warmth, from you, under the Great Source of all good, came the kindling spark."

Rosa could not speak now, and she had no other way of testifying her feelings to her blind companion. He continued,

"Most probably I shall never have an oppor-

tunity of showing you my gratitude, but I regret this the less, because I know you believe in, and trust to it. Rosa, I would as willingly receive an obligation from you, as render one to you, and you are the only human being of whom I could say this. To be your debtor is sweet indeed."

During these years Rosa had not been only the eyes through which he saw, the hands by which he worked, and the glass through which the light of his mind shone, but she had taught him some independent means of employment and amusement.

Thus he had acquired the art of reading with fluency the books printed for the blind, and had collected every one of those published—a poor and scanty library for Robert Clifden, yet containing one Book which he now felt to be worth all the books the proudest libraries could boast. He could also write, though with labour. But the acquirement which he felt at present, the greatest gain was that of music—Rosa had taught him to play the piano, and he had discovered

that he had a voice as well as an ear for melody. In his earlier life, Robert Clifden had despised musical gentlemen, now he was wiser, and owned how the beauty and sublimity of sound may solace sorrow, deepen happiness, and express that which is otherwise inexpressible. In the long May evenings, for it was spring once more, Robert and Rosa would sing and play together, feeling that they were happy, and that if life had denied them some of those blessings they had once most eagerly prized, from their very privations and trials had sprung a profound joy.

Even Mrs. Clifden was sometimes soothed into amiability by the music, and the sight of Robert's increased happiness, and would comment upon her own wisdom in having taken Rosa back, an act which she appeared to view in the light of a good work which had met with its reward, but for the result of which she did not seem to think any more gratitude was due to Rosa, than if she had been the piano, which was also a source of advantage to her nephew. She

seemed to regard her protégée somewhat in the light of a machine useful for giving advice.

One evening they had all been sitting in the drawing-room, and Robert and Rosa had been playing a duet; when it was finished, the latter left the room to bring her work, to be ready when the lamp should come. It was dark, and Mrs. Clifden half reclined in an easy chair by the fireside, for the evenings were still chilly. Robert remained sitting at the piano, with his head leant upon his hand, in a thoughtful attitude. His aunt could just see him in the twilight, and she was struck by his somewhat despondent attitude.

Now the sight of Robert in dejection, like any thing else which Mrs. Clifden did not like, generally made her irritable and cross, but to-night, perhaps from the influence of the music, she was in an unusually amiable frame of mind, and as she looked at him, she began to weep—ready tears being another common phase of her condition.

"My poor boy," she said, "I cannot bear to see you look so. It breaks my heart, it is very hard. Come and sit by me, my darling. Tell me what you are thinking of."

Robert's heart always melted towards his aunt in her amiable moods, and he remembered then only her afflictions and her love for himself. He came as he was desired, and sat by her, taking her withered hand in his, and pressing it tenderly.

"I was thinking," he said, "how blessed I am in your affection and Rosa's, and what a cast-away I should be without either of you."

"My poor Robert, it is very hard—very hard indeed," she said, crying again: "Life is short, and uncertain, and I am not—not that I am very ill—I feel quite well, only weak, and weak, delicate people live the longest; but I am older than your mother, and in the course of nature—This girl really seems fond of you, and useful to you, and understands your ways—"

"Rosa, do you mean?"

"Yes, I mean Rosa ; she is clever, and much improved. Perhaps as things are now, Robert, you had better marry her after all !"

Marry her ! Robert's hands shook violently and his face flushed crimson. He was so terribly agitated, that it was two or three minutes ere he could speak. At last he said,

"Tell me, aunt, what Rosa looks like, now."

Eager in reality now for what she had once so much disliked, although she had just enough of pride and self-command left to make her wish to conceal her extreme eagerness, Mrs. Clifden answered,

"She is ten times handsomer now than she used to be ; that school-girl awkwardness is quite gone. As to appearance, even I should be satisfied, and no doubt in so different a position she would soon be dignified."

To this speech Robert returned no answer, but remained buried in thought. Fancying he was not quite satisfied, his aunt continued,

"I assure you, everybody admires her. The

Scotch lady she was with, Lady—dear me, what was her name? I wonder how it has escaped me. I have generally such a good memory—Lady—Lady Mac Whin; Lady Mac Whin said she was a perfect beauty.”

“A perfect beauty, and everybody admires her. Oh, my dear aunt! do you think that Rosa, in the bloom of her youth, and her health, and her beauty, with life and hope before her, would unite herself to me now, when she rejected me before, when I could have offered—when at least I might have been a protector, and not a burden.”

Mrs. Clifden was now crying, and fretfully reproached her nephew with being cruel and speaking to vex her, and saying that he must know that Rosa would be glad to take him; and as for her rejection, it was all nonsense and because she knew at that time the match would never be permitted.”

“My dear aunt!” said Robert soothingly and kindly, “indeed I do not speak to vex you, but—”

“Oh no, of course not, it is my own fault, and I am an unreasonable, foolish old woman—this comes of one spoiling one’s child. This is the gratitude—”

“Dear aunt ! I am afraid you have spoilt me, but—”

“No, no, you are not spoilt, you shall not say so, but if I could suppose that that poor nobody of a girl could fancy for a moment—”

“It is not what she fancies, dear aunt ; but setting aside altogether her probable feelings, my own conscience tells me that I, useless, helpless, a care and a charge to those around me, am not fit to fulfil the duties of the head of a family. More of these devolve on the position I already occupy than I can fulfil. Even were it in my power, which it is not,—oh do not let me dream for a moment that it is—I should think it wrong to permit myself to be tempted. It would be throwing far, far too much upon another—too much even for her. No ; I ought not to marry, and I never will marry ”

These last words were pronounced in firmer and louder tones than any he had yet employed, and Rosa heard them as she re-entered the room. For a second a violent spasm seemed to rend her heart, and she felt sick and fainting. But quickly recovering her self-possession, she walked to a distant window, and sat down on a settee.

There she took herself severely to task. And, indeed, after the shock had passed away, she was not unhappy : Robert Clifden would never marry. Then she should always be his first friend.

And now she acknowledged to herself that to have seen him married to another, she could not have borne.

No : no one would ever read to him, write to him, work for him, live for him, as she had done. She was not unhappy, but she feared she was selfish.

With the quick ear of the blind Robert had recognised her step as she came into the room, but he did not think she had heard him. Mrs. Clifden in the meantime appeared to have fallen

into one of her dozing, sleepy fits, which were always accompanied with indifference.

Robert quitting her side drew near to Rosa in the window, and asked if the moon were rising yet, and being answered that it had just appeared, requested her to describe the scene to him.

It was a few days after the conversation between the aunt and nephew recorded above, that Rosa having finished her morning studies and morning labours, repaired, as was her wont, to the dressing-room of Mrs. Clifden, where, the tedious toilet of the latter being completed by this hour, she was usually wheeled in her chair, and remained till the afternoon, when she was taken to the drawing-room. Here Rosa usually read to her for an hour or two from the pages of some excessively romantic and high-flown novel—the more unlike reality, the more full of exaggerated sentiment, and improbable adventure, her auditor liked it the better. Rosa was at present reading Alexandre Dumas' "Chateau

d'If." She had the volume in her hand, and taking her usual seat was beginning at once to read, when, to her surprise, Mrs. Clifden interrupted her.

"Lay down the book, Rosa ; I want to talk with you to-day, rather than to hear you read. I have had something on my mind for some time."

Mrs. Clifden spoke more collectedly and with more of her old determination than was her wont. Surprised and somewhat curious Rosa obeyed her.

"You are very much improved, Rosa, both in manners and appearance, and I must say you are very attentive and grateful both to Robert and me, and the chief thing now for my poor Robert is to have somebody to amuse him. He has really been a different creature since you came. I have therefore made up my mind—stay—what was I saying?—what was I thinking of?" said Mrs. Clifden, with her usual inability to keep her mind fixed for any length of time, even on that subject which interested

her most. She remained for some little time in an attitude partly bewildered, partly thoughtful. At last a light seemed to break upon her puzzled countenance.

"Oh yes! I recollect—I am so anxious about it, Rosa. I have quite decided now that my nephew shall marry you."

Rosa started in amazement, and the book which she still held in her hand fell with a noise upon the floor—an incident which at once roused the irritable, nervous temper of Mrs. Clifden. Having scolded Rosa severely, and told her she was always noisy and careless, her wrath cooled down, and she said more calmly, but still querulously,

"Why don't you answer? You heard what I said. You know I cannot bear to be kept waiting."

Rosa stammered, coloured, trembled, and finally answered—

"Robert does not wish to marry."

"Nonsense!" she answered angrily. "He

fell in love with you when he was quite a boy—if he had not been a mere boy he would never have been so foolish—I would not allow it then, you may remember. But now it is different. You are of use to him; you know his ways, and when I am gone you will be kind to him; you will be the same to him you are now, won't you, my dear?" And as Mrs. Clifden spoke, she melted into one of her fits of tears. But ere long recovering herself, she continued—

"Not that there is any reason I should talk of dying. I am not old, and I have no complaint. I shall soon get over this weakness. Only life is always uncertain. But why don't you promise me, Rosa?" she added quite sharply,

"I can promise you to do the same for him always that I do now."

"But how can you do that, unless you are married to him? You could not live in the same house with him, without me."

Strangely enough, this state of matters had

never struck Rosa before. She could not continue with Robert Clifden after the death of his aunt. It was quite impossible. A feeling of dismay struck to her heart as she caught a vague but overpowering glimpse of Robert's helplessness and her own desolation.

She felt and sympathised with Mrs. Clifden, too, as she had never done in her life before, as she saw the eagerness painted in her poor shrunken face—an eagerness which the remnant of her old pride in vain attempted to conceal. Stronger far even than the pride, Rosa now saw was her love for her nephew, which had urged her to become a suitor where she had once so much despised. Helplessness and suffering had taught even the worldly heart of Mrs. Clifden, that there are more valuable things than wealth and station, though it is much to be feared that she was still ignorant as to what are the most valuable things.

“You see, Rosa,” she said half-impatiently, half-entreatingly, “you see you must leave him if

you are not married, and though he is—is blind, where will *you* ever get such another match. Surely you are not such a fool as to refuse him, when I allow you to have him, Rosa !” The passion of her eagerness was beyond the control of her weak frame. Her pale features worked, and her rapidly changing colour bore witness to the agitation of her mind. Considerably frightened, Rosa replied, hardly knowing what she said,

“It does not depend upon me, madam, indeed. If I thought your nephew—”

“Oh ! as to that, he is certainly—but I know how to manage him—I know how he feels—that is, would feel without me ; leave me to deal with him. He always required management. He spoke of you the other day as if, after me, you were the only one—and you are, Rosa—don’t be conceited, but you are. Will you marry him if he wishes it—will you ?” she cried, rising, and almost with a scream. Her whole countenance was dreadfully convulsed,

and she hung on Rosa's answer as if the words were to bring life or death.

Terrified, and hardly knowing what she said, Rosa gave the promise she durst not at that moment have withheld.

"Ring the bell for Robert," cried Mrs. Clifden more wildly still, and without sitting down.

"Mrs. Clifden ! madam !" cried Rosa, her whole face overspread with crimson, " you must not——"

"Ring," she cried, and in terror Rosa had barely time to obey, when Mrs. Clifden fell senseless into her arms.

Rosa had rung with such violence, that not only Mrs. Clifden's maid, but Emily, Watkins, and Robert rushed to answer the summons. Robert had been seated in his own sitting-room when he heard the bell, and recognising it by its sound to be that of his aunt's room, and knowing Rosa to be with her, had dreaded the event which had really taken place. He was hurrying along the corridor, and within an inch

of tumbling over a broom which Emily had thrown down in her hurry, when he was stopped by Watkins, who, to guard him safely had attended him to the door of Mrs. Clifden's apartment. The exclamations of the maid and Emily had induced him to enter.

"Rosa!" cried Robert. "Aunt! Aunt! what is the matter?"

The maid and Emily had already assisted Rosa to lay Mrs. Clifden on the sofa, and the latter had hastened to Robert's side.

"Dear Robert," she said softly.

He stretched out his hand, and eagerly seized hers.

"Rosa—my aunt—tell me."

"She is living I think, Robert. Watkins, send instantly for the doctor."

But Watkins had already anticipated the order. The female servants in the meantime by Rosa's directions were bathing Mrs. Clifden's head with vinegar and water, and applying bottles of hot water to her feet. Robert knelt by the sofa on

which she was laid, and clasped the cold hand in his ; his countenance was sad and deadly pale, but perfectly composed. At last, when the two servants had both quitted the room, he said to Rosa, who was now bathing Mrs. Clifden's head herself,

"She is quite insensible ? "

"Quite."

"I have long expected this day, Rosa, and I fancied I was prepared for it. I know," he continued, his face becoming if possible paler and his lip trembling. "I know this is the end. It is long since I looked upon her face, and now I shall hear her voice no more. It is a terrible thing to lose the one who loves us best." He stopped, adding a minute or two afterwards, but rather as if in soliloquy than as if speaking to Rosa :

"Alone and in darkness ! "

"Alone Robert !" Rosa whispered, but he either did not hear her, or the half-reproachful sympathy of her tone met with no response in

his feelings. For a moment Rosa's heart sank. But she stifled almost in its birth the half-sad, half-resentful sentiment. She felt selfish at having thought at all in such a moment, of her own feelings.

The medical man on his arrival gave them little hope of Mrs. Clifden's recovery. An eminent practitioner who had been sent for to Liverpool, and who arrived by special train the same evening, was not more sanguine. Every means that human skill could devise were tried and all in vain.

Nothing remained for Robert and Rosa to do but to wait the coming of that mysterious stroke which, however it might alter the position of the dying to the world of spirits, could not sever Mrs. Clifden of Riversthaite more entirely than she was already severed from the pomp and the dignity she had so much loved.

It was on the evening of the day on which Mrs. Clifden had been seized, that Robert, who had sat quite silent for an hour, except that he

now and then enquired of Rosa how his aunt looked, suddenly observed :

“ I think, Rosa, you had better write by to-night’s post to Lady Isabella and tell her what has happened. Say there is no hope.”

Robert’s tone was stern with grief, and he sank again into a silence which seemed to forbid all expression of sympathy. Rosa was disappointed that he did not seem either to expect or to wish that she should console him. Complying with his suggestion, however, she wrote a brief note to Lady Isabella, and then returned to her post by Mrs. Clifden’s bedside.

It was on the morning of the third day after the attack and Mrs. Clifden was still alive, though it was evident the last moment was at hand, that a travelling carriage drove up to the great door of Riversthaite Hall. Robert was the first to hear it.

“ Who can it be ? ” cried Rosa.

“ Lady Isabella Mac Whin, I think,” Robert answered.

And in fact Lady Isabella it was, accompanied by Helen, and in a few seconds Rosa was folded in the arms of her friend.

“How kind of you! how kind of you, dearest Lady Isabella!”

“Not kinder than you deserve from me my own child. At such a time as this you could not leave your poor cousin, and yet, dearest, you could not well have remained without me.”

Rosa coloured up to the roots of her hair. The idea had never struck her before, but she perceived in a moment that it had struck Robert. She saw at once now why he had wished her to write to Lady Isabella, and she saw also that with the life of his aunt must terminate the life of close companionship they had led for nearly three years.

The same night Mrs. Clifden died—so gradually and quietly, that it was difficult to fix the precise moment in which life departed. Several times had Robert asked:

“Is it all over?”

At last Rosa answered,

“ Yes Robert, it is all over.” He made no reply even by a gesture. For a long time, the silence of Death reigned in the chamber.

At last she added, hesitatingly and in a whisper ;

“ Robert, shall I leave you ?”

“ Yes,” he said, and then added solemnly as she rose and was moving away, “ God bless you Rosa, and reward you for ever and ever !”

The tone, and the words fell upon Rosa’s ear like an everlasting farewell. She felt that they were the knell of their separation, and hastening to the little breakfast room where she found Lady Isabella, she relieved her agitated feelings by a flood of tears on her friend’s bosom.

Lady Isabella judiciously permitted her to weep copiously for a long time and then she and Helen put her to bed. But the early dawn of the May morning was breaking, and the joyous song of the birds fell strangely on the ear of

Rosa Grey ere sleep visited her heavy eyelids. And then it was but a feverish slumber, broken by painful dreams and disturbed by recollections of long past sorrow. Now Rosa Grey was watching by the death-bed of her mother in all the agony of her grief, and as she watched the sweet, pale countenance of the saintly sufferer became changed into the disturbed, uneasy features of Mrs. Clifden, and then the form of Robert would arrest her gaze and as she strained her eyes and stretched out her arms, it would retreat away into the distance and darkness while some spell would seem to hold her limbs motionless and her tongue tied, and a horrible sensation of being bereaved and forsaken would fill her whole being.

At last, however, she fell into a deeper sleep; and the morning was already far advanced ere she returned to consciousness. When she did, the gentle countenance of Lady Isabella Mac Whin was bending anxiously and affectionately over hers; remembering all the past Rosa lifted her

heart in gratitude to Him who had yet left her so kind a friend.

As soon as she was dressed she went down stairs to the breakfast room and in a few minutes was joined by Robert. His face was very pale and very sad, but perfectly composed. He took Rosa's hand and enquired how she had rested with a tone which in the sincerity of the interest it bespoke was almost tender, and yet which seemed to Rosa to say plainly they were no more what they had been.

The few days which intervened between the funeral served to deepen this impression. Except at meals she rarely met Robert Clifden. Sad, composed, and kind he ever was. His manner indicated no diminution of regard or esteem, but all confidential intercourse between them was at an end. On the morning of the funeral he did not make his appearance. Rosa gathered from Watkins that he was in a state of terrible agitation and distress. Through the latter she hinted an offer to come to him if he wished. He sent her back a

message; "His kindest regards and his thanks for all her goodness, but he dared not see any one that morning."

"Oh, Miss, I wish he would have seen you," said Watkins, "for I never saw my poor master so cut up."

From the same authority, however, Rosa learned that at the funeral he had been perfectly composed.

Mrs. Clifden's will was read in the afternoon of the same day. The whole of her property, with the exception of a legacy of a thousand pounds to Rosa Grey, five hundred to Watkins, and a few smaller legacies to some of the other servants, was left to her nephew, Robert Conway Clifden. A codicil had, however, been added to her will, about six weeks before her death, in which she revoked the legacy of a thousand pounds to Rosa Grey, leaving her instead, ten thousand, but on condition that she should marry her nephew, Robert Conway Clifden, within eighteen months after her own death. She

added that she wished the world to know that in marrying Rosa Grey, her nephew married with her entire approbation.

It was with a feeling of the extremest misery and awkwardness that Rosa met Robert Clifden the following morning. Had it not been for the presence of Lady Isabella, she did not think she could have borne the meeting. During the few days that Lady Isabella had been at Riversthaite, she had come out quite in a new character—a character which perhaps surprised herself, as much as any one else. Her strong affection for Rosa had induced her on receiving the intelligence of Mrs. Clifden's attack, to determine on travelling express to Riversthaite, although at the moment she made the decision, she fancied that it might almost be at the risk of her life. To her surprise, however, she was not only not in the least fatigued, but hardly ever in her life before had she felt so well. She was astonished and delighted to feel the extent of her own powers, both of body and mind. It

was not less gratifying than it was new to her to find herself in the position of an adviser and consoler—to find that Rosa, on whom she had so long depended, now depended on her.

On the morning of which I have just spoken, Robert was perfectly silent. He merely touched Rosa's hand ere they sat down to breakfast. His hand was as cold as ice. He ate nothing, and seemed in a state of abstraction. Rosa could not even find voice to offer him tea, but Lady Isabella did and said all that was necessary and kind. Rosa felt almost glad that he could not see her. When at last the meal was finished, if meal it could be called, at which nobody ate anything, Robert said in a nervous, agitated manner, his pale cheek flushing as he spoke,

“Rosa, will you and Lady Isabella do me the favour to accompany me to my study? There is still one little piece of business which must be done.”

With some curiosity, but without asking any explanation, both the ladies complied. In

Robert's room they found awaiting them the family man of business, and a young man, his clerk. The former had in his hand what seemed to be a legal document.

"Is it all ready, Mr. Woodford?" Robert enquired.

"It only requires your signature and that of the witnesses." As he spoke he laid the document on the table, and putting a pen in Robert's hand, at the request of the latter, placed the hand on the spot where his signature was required. Having written his name, Robert then requested Lady Isabella and the young clerk to add theirs as witnesses. When it was all finished, taking the document he gave it to Rosa, saying ;

"Rosa, this is but an act of justice." In a state of nervous agitation and bewilderment, she took the paper, hardly knowing what she was doing, and not at all realising that it could have any connection with her. The solicitor and his clerk immediately took leave. As soon as they were gone, Robert said, turning to wher

Rosa was yet standing with the paper hanging from her hand,

“ You and Lady Isabella, I believe, leave me to-morrow.”

“ Yes,” said Rosa, in a choking voice; “ we thought it was best.”

“ So it is,” he said, “ every day would have made—that is—Rosa, you must forgive me saying more—I dare not. I know you will not, — I am sure you cannot mistake my feelings.”

Rosa could not answer. Her understanding and her senses seemed both to have failed her. Robert waited a few seconds, then continued sadly,

“ Say some friendly words to me Rosa, I cannot see your face.”

“ Dear Robert, you cannot any more than I do, require words to assure you of the strength and sincerity of my friendship.”

“ Thank you, and bless you, Rosa. Lady Isabella has been so kind as to invite me to visit her and you at Highriggs, and perhaps I may come—”

“*Perhaps!*” cried Rosa.

“Nay, I shall certainly come some time or other if I live, but I was going to say I shall *perhaps* come in the autumn—if—if—My coming is very doubtful, and previous to that period, I must visit Paris. Rosa will you promise to write to me often?”

“Yes, very often.”

“Whether I write to you or not. I will answer every letter I possibly can, but circumstances may prevent me, and I tell you this, that you may neither be anxious nor displeased if you do not hear from me. Watkins goes with me, and he will write to you, if there is anything wrong. You will write to me then Rosa. Your letters are all I have left to me in the world.”

“Rosa’s heart bounded with joy as she gave the promise so eagerly entreated, though an anxious curiosity the next instant weighed upon her mind. What could Robert be going to do in Paris? But he did not explain, and there was something in his manner which seemed to forbid all question on the subject.

As soon as Lady Isabella and Rosa were alone, the former said,

“Rosa, you have not yet looked at the contents of the paper you hold in your hand.” Rosa started. It had entirely escaped her memory, but remembering by whom it had been given to her, she turned to it with interest. It contained on the part of Robert Clifden, an entire and unconditional resignation for ever, of all claim on the ten thousand pounds left to Rosa in his aunt’s will. As soon as the latter fully understood the import of the document, she burst into tears.

“What is the matter, my dearest child?” cried Lady Isabella tenderly.

“He might have spared me this assurance that his wishes are not those of his aunt.”

“Rather, perhaps, he wishes your choice to be uninfluenced but by one motive.”

“He knows I am not—never was influenced by any other.”

“Well then, Rosa, it is your comfort and

independence he thinks of. Place yourself in his position, my love, and bethink yourself if under any circumstances you would have acted otherwise than he has done."

Rosa leant her head on her friend's bosom, considered, and was consoled.

"I wish," she said fervently, I *wish* I knew what he was going to do in Paris."

"So do I. It puzzles me, Rosa. My child, if he does not come in the autumn, you must not break your heart."

Rosa promised she would not, fondly kissing her kind friend, but as she pictured the possibility of his not coming, she felt a sick spasm, almost like a foretaste of death.

CHAPTER XII.

ROSA had not seen Highriggs for a long time, but it wore the same bright, flowery, elegant, luxurious aspect it had done years before. She hoped it would lull her spirits and compose her mind after the gloom of Riversthwaite. It seemed to her that the dreamy poetry and indolent seclusion of the place were exactly suited to her present mood.

Nelly Jemmison was the first person she beheld on her arrival at her old home. Nelly,

although no longer "so young as she had been," was little changed,—a little darker, a little more wrinkly and gaunt, perhaps, but her eye was as bright as ever, and the shrewd sense of her countenance was qualified by a happier, less harsh expression. Her face visibly brightened and softened as she beheld Lady Isabella and Rosa. She seized both the hands of the latter and shook them warmly, while she peered into her face with a sort of anxious interest.

"My dearie, ye are unco white and thin, but ye'll sune be better here." Then she added doubtfully, as if she feared the question might be considered presumptuous,

"An' how is puir Mr. Clifden? I'm no speiring oot o' ony impudent curiosity, Miss Rosa. I'm nane o' your claverin folk like the lassie Ealen, though she's no a bad lassie aither, but ye ken ye were aye like my ain bairn."

Rosa answered kindly that she quite understood her motives, and that Mr. Clifden was in great distress, but otherwise quite well."

“In distress—is he?” thoughtfully, and then significantly, but with still greater hesitation, as if she feared to offend. “Yon was a nice lad, Miss Rosa, and sae gude till his auntie—a real canny lad. There are waur things, Miss Rosa, nor being blind, an’ ye ken it’s no as if he had to wark for his bread. He has plenty o’ gear, hinny.” Then noticing that Rosa looked distressed, she added, “But I axe yer pardon, my dearie! and dinna ye gang till think that auld Nelly disna ken now that the gear is no the best o’ gifts. Na, na, Miss Rosa, I ha’ been ower fond o’t i’ my day, but now that I ha’ mair than e’er I had, I ha been brout to see I canna ser God and Mammon. It’s a sair warstle whiles, Miss Rosa, but the grace o’ God is sufficient even for an auld mammon-worshipping sinner like me. Eh! aye, hinny, when I look back on the time I said I couldna forgie, I feel I am indeed a vessel o’ mercy. To think what the Lord has forgien me. An’ ye was the instrument, Miss Rosa. But, my lamb, gin ye had gear ye wad make gude use on’t.”

"God knows best about that, Nelly," said Rosa with a gentle smile.

"Weel! He dis, Miss Rosa," said Nelly, convinced, but a little regretful notwithstanding. "It's a' in His ain gude time. I maun mind that," she added in a tone of reproof to herself; "but, my lamb, I am an auld woman now, and I wad like weel to see ye abune a' need for this warld gin I leave ye."

"Above the reach of want, dear Nelly! I have forgotten to tell you I am a rich woman now. I have ten thousand pounds of my own!"

Nelly's bright eyes opened wide, and she became for a moment pale with surprise and pleasure.

"Ten thousand! That maun be aboot as muckle as Leddy Isabella's hersel. Oh, hinny, I hope I am no ower glad. An' did the auld leddy that's gane, leave ye a'that? She maun ha' been fond aboot ye, after a'. Weel, weel, hinny! ye needna marry gin ye dinna like. Ye'll ha' plenty choice, I trow, wi'yer bonny face and sic a fortune."

Again Rosa smiled faintly and sadly, but Nelly was too much occupied by the pleasant thoughts to which this intelligence gave rise to notice it. She remained for some moments quite lost in a delightful reverie; at last she broke it by ejaculating fervently,

“Eh, sirse hinny! I hope I’m no ower pleased!” Then, after a short pause, she asked, “But what div ye think o’the Leddy Isabell? Dis na she look weel?”

“I never saw her look so well in my life.”

“Aye, she gets up till her breakfast, now. She’s built a schule doon at the wast gate, and gangs doon till’t hersel ilka fine day. She gangs aboot amang the puir folk, an’ is muckle taen up wi’ her green hoos. Whiles ye ken she has her bits o’headaches and pains when it’s been wat wather for a week or the like, and she’s whiles a bit snappish yet, but she no kens, I think; and eh, Miss Rosa! she is a gude mistress; I ne’er kenned sic another but ane; wae’s me hinny! but she’s in a better place. But ye maun come and see my hoos, Miss Rosa.”

Joy at seeing her beloved young mistress had made Nelly quite loquacious. With some pride and much gratitude she exhibited her little domicile. It was a neat cottage in a retired part of the grounds not far from the house, and at one side of a bleaching green surrounded by trees. The whitest linen in the world was spread out on the green, and glittered in the sunshine. There were two apartments inside the cottage, shining with cleanliness, and jessamine and China roses peeped in at the windows.

"It's a sweet bit place," said Nelly, "and the mavis and laverock sing that sweet i' the spring-time. Her Leddyship has settled it on me for life, and left me what she ca's a 'nuity; but ye ken I'm an auld woman by her. Eh, Miss Rosa! the lines ha' fa'en to me in a pleasant place; bit it wadna be the same place gin Leddy Isabell were gane. Weel, weel, I hope it may be His will to tak me first, but it is a sure thing nane on us a' ha ony continuing city here."

To Rosa's great satisfaction she found that Nelly had given her a correct account of the change in Lady Isabella's mode of life. Her character now appeared exactly as Nelly had described it—bringing to her life new usefulness and happiness, yet still a little, though almost unconsciously, tinctured with some of the foibles induced by long indulged habit. But these appeared less perhaps to Rosa, than to anyone else, for, true as ever to the self-sacrificing generosity of her real nature, Lady Isabella was so anxious to console and gratify her young friend, that she appeared in her very best and most cheerful light. Rosa did not find her life at Highriggs exactly what she had expected—not so dreamy, not so poetical, and at first she fancied, not so soothing. The truth was, Lady Isabella for the time laid aside what were still her favourite studies, though she indulged in them less frequently than formerly, rightly deeming that occupation of a more bracing nature was better for Rosa's mind. She had no society to offer her, but she insisted

on her taking an interest in her school, and going down to it every day. Rosa was at first unwilling, as she had never had any experience in teaching, and fancied she had no talent for it, but her friend was convinced that any sociable employment was better for her than a mere life of memory and thought. And in a few weeks Rosa awoke to a consciousness both of the wisdom and the kindness which dictated the course Lady Isabella had taken. The constant letters she received from Robert Clifden helped also to cheer and interest her. They were of course short, as it was an immense labour to him to write at all, but far more even than his spoken words had done, did they breathe a perfect regard for, and confidence in her. She felt that if Robert Clifden did not love her in the sense he had once done, there was at least no other human being in the world for whom he felt an equal esteem and admiration, or towards whom it was likely he would ever entertain such a sentiment. Thus it was that the summer passed to Rosa in quiet em-

ployments and in peace, if not in absolute happiness.

She had been some weeks at Highriggs, when one morning a very rickety, dilapidated brougham—the only hired carriage which Birken-side could boast, drove up to the door, and on the footman announcing that Miss Grey was at home, Doctor Turner, his wife, and two daughters descended from the vehicle. Mrs. and the Miss Turners, although they had frequently invited Rosa to their house and always treated her with kindness as far as they comprehended the meaning of the term, had never before thought it necessary to call upon her, and she wondered what could have induced the doctor to launch out into the expense of a carriage—an expense which, from old recollection, she knew he grudged extremely. The three ladies were also evidently dressed in their best, with very gay new muslins, the mother with a new green and the daughters with new pink bonnets. Rosa supposed at once that the finery

was to do honour to Lady Isabella, and on account of the Turners, she felt a little vexed that her Ladyship did not make her appearance, as she fancied they would think their preparations wasted upon her. Whatever ulterior object, however, they might have had in the hope of seeing Lady Isabella, they betrayed no disappointment, and showed that they had had such expectations only by an occasional glance at the drawing-room door.

Doctor Turner's manner to Rosa had once more undergone a metamorphosis. It was no longer patronising—far less familiar than it had ever been. It seemed in fact to aim at a friendly respect which was almost deferential. Mrs. Turner was more silent than usual, evidently Rosa thought a little awe stricken. The girls were quite extravagant in their demonstrations of joy at the sight of their old friend, but even with the apparent excess of their delight, was mingled a species of constraint, as if they were not quite at ease, and did not quite know what

degree of intimacy to assume. Rosa could not help noticing that Grace's sharp eyes wandered around the room, as if making a mental inventory of everything it contained.

"We intended, Miss Rosa," said the Doctor pompously, "if you will permit an old friend to use an old name, to have had the honour of calling on you two or three weeks ago, but my professional engagements and various little matters have prevented us. We have been all quite impatient to see you, and we hope you will give us the pleasure of a few days. The best bed-room is all ready for you. It will do you good after your long attendance on your excellent and lamented aunt. What a clever woman she was! Now do name a day."

"Do Miss Grey," said Mrs. Turner.

"Do Rosa, dear," said Grace, "I am so longing to have a talk with you—you know you were always my greatest friend, and I am sure you are one that does not forget your old friends—just like myself. If I were to marry a man with

five thousand a year, my old friends would always find me the same. I was so glad when I heard your aunt had taken you back and left you her fortune. It was only right. How did she make up matters with you? Did her Ladyship manage it for you? Are you to live with Lady Isabella now, quite as her friend? Dear me what changes! your aunt did not leave you all her fortune? Whom did she leave the rest to?"

"To her nephew!"

"Dear me. I did not know she had a nephew. Did you ever see him? Is he young? Is he handsome? Is he married? Do you think he will marry? I fancy a person like him will look high."

Rosa answered as few of these questions as politeness would permit, but remembering that the Turners had been kind in her time of need, she was as friendly as possible, and accepted their invitation for a couple of days, at which all the party seemed highly pleased. Helen's manner was, indeed, unfeignedly affectionate.

"This is really kind of you, dear Rosa—you had always such a kind heart. I am so glad of your good fortune."

Helen spoke with so much natural kind feeling that Rosa gratefully and warmly pressed her hand.

"We are all glad, I suppose," said Grace a little sharply to her sister, for she had determined to be the most intimate with the heiress, as she considered Rosa. Indeed at all times, and in everything, she had always fancied it her right to take the lead of Helen.

"Well," said the Doctor, "it really is refreshing to meet with gratitude. But I always thought Miss Rosa would not forget us. Of course in honouring our humble abode we shall endeavour to have every comfort for her within our small means—though of course in one way we cannot compete with her Ladyship. Will you make my respectful compliments to her Ladyship. I am glad her Ladyship is so well now. Excellent, benevolent woman her Ladyship, but

has whims still. Of course 'all great people have—what can we expect? But I beg your pardon, Miss Rosa, she is your friend and all that, and I really congratulate you, and feel proud to think I was the humble instrument to introduce you here. I knew what I was doing; I knew I was not mistaken. But come, girls, you must part with your friend as soon as she has named her day. I know you will talk of nothing else till the time comes. Mrs. Turner, my dear!"

And so the visit terminated, amid the kisses of the girls and the bows of their father.

Summer had now begun to melt into autumn. The leaves assumed a duskier green, the rose and the lily gave place to the fuchsia and geranium, and the fields whitened to harvest. The evenings, too, were shorter, but mild and balmy as ever, and the clear, calm moon rose glorious in the darker sky. Rosa began to wonder if Robert would come to Highriggs, and at Lady Isabella's request wrote to ask him. In his

answer he informed her that he was to start for Paris the following day; but that he still hoped, though he felt he must not be too sanguine, to see her before the winter. She heard from him again immediately after his arrival at Paris. His letter was very brief, merely to say that he had accomplished his journey in safety, and was well. He concluded—"If all goes right I hope to be with you ere the snow falls. But whether absent or present, I am equally and for ever, your most affectionate and most grateful friend."

Rosa replied to this letter very quickly, and for two or three weeks it made her happy. But when she had written twice and even three times and no answer came—nothing but a French newspaper addressed by Watkins, in spite of the warning Robert had given her, she became anxious and miserable. Over and over again she perused his last letter, striving to wring from it some information. The words, "if all goes right," which at first seemed to be a mere general expression of deference to the will of

Providence, now appeared to point to some possible evil occurrence. What could it be? Rosa felt that if this silence and mystery were long continued it must kill her.

As Robert had himself requested, she continued to write to him at the hotel in Paris, from which his letter had been dated, but she wrote without spirit, and with a dread of which she could not divest herself, that her letters would never reach him. She told him she was anxious to know what caused his silence, but *how* anxious she did not tell, as she knew he had to employ other eyes than his own to read her letters, even had there been no other reason to induce her to be silent on the extent of the anxiety she suffered.

Rosa felt that of all the trials of her life this was the greatest. Yet she did not altogether sink under it, though as week after week passed away, as the days became shorter and chillier, as the flowers withered, and the leaves grew yellower and scantier, her hopes faded with the

flowers, and her life like the season grew dim and chill. Her face became pale, thin, and anxious, her eye restless and eager, and her manner nervous. Each morning as post-time drew nigh she wore a look of feverish expectation, and as each morning passed and brought no letter, this look was succeeded by one of disappointment and anguish. Yet Rosa strove to employ herself. She found it impossible to read or to occupy herself in anything which required mental application, but she did quantities of needlework, played the piano, and raked the fallen leaves off the flower beds, visited the poor, and took long walks and drives. Lady Isabella almost feared she might wear out her strength, yet exercise seemed better than no occupation at all. As the time dragged on, and her anxiety, though less intense became more desponding, sleep, too, almost forsook her.

Lady Isabella and Nelly both did their best to console her, but both were as much puzzled as herself to divine the mystery.

"Of one thing I am sure my dearest child," said the former, "that Mr. Clifden's regard for you is beyond all doubt. He himself prepared you for this, thus thinking to spare you anxiety."

"But though I did not think of it at first, this very circumstance increases my anxiety. I never dreamt that his silence was to last above a week or two. I see now he meant to prepare me for this terrible suspense. It must I fear be something very dreadful which could induce him to inflict it on me."

"He does not know, my love, how much you feel it perhaps."

"Oh I wish he had told me all, surely it would have been kinder."

"We cannot judge, dearest Rosa, unless we knew the circumstances. My own dear girl, you must not be so miserable about what may be nothing."

"Oh dear Lady Isabella! I fear I am very sinful. Believe me there are moments when I do realise, when I do clearly see that all is by

the permission of my Father in Heaven, and therefore that my anxiety is vanity of vanities. But my health was not quite right when it began. I was feeling the effect of the fatigue at Rivers-thwaite."

Hitherto, a week had never elapsed without bringing Rosa a newspaper. At last, however, on one occasion the usual day passed without a paper. It was, however, quite possible that there might have been some delay of the post. But the next day passed and the next and the next and no paper. The next week came and the paper day went by once more. Rosa felt as if all hope was over. A profound, silent anguish settled down upon her spirits.

When the post came in now, Rosa always turned away her head. She tried thus to force herself to believe that she expected no longer any intelligence. One morning along with the daily paper, a letter was brought in. Rosa saw it instantly—almost ere the footman had crossed the threshold of the door, for some-

how she seemed always to possess the faculty of seeing at a glance what he brought. Now, however, she resolutely walked to the window, and turning her back, seemed engaged in the contemplation of the view as seen through the thickest and mistiest drizzle that ever fell on a morning late in October, while the servant handed the salver first to Lady Isabella. She of course saw the letter too, and took it. Rosa feeling certain as the man quitted the room, though not without a pang, which in vain she strove to conceal from herself, that the letter was for her friend, turned round.

"Sit down, my dear," said Lady Isabella.

Mechanically and listlessly Rosa obeyed.

"My dearest Rosa! this letter is for you."

Rosa started, her bosom heaved, and she stretched out her hand. The eager, alarmed enquiry spoke from her eyes as they sought those of Lady Isabella. Lady Isabella answered with an affectionate, anxious, yet hopeful glance, as she put the letter into her hand in an agony of

suspense. Rosa glanced at the address. It was in the handwriting of Robert Clifden.

The surprise—the sudden ecstasy was too much for her after the long and violent tension in which her mind had been held, and she fainted away. It required for several minutes the united efforts of Lady Isabella, Helen, and Nelly, who chanced to be in the house, to restore her to animation, and when she had opened her eyes and spoke once more it was incoherently as if her mind wandered. Much alarmed Lady Isabella dispatched instantly a messenger for Dr. Turner. When that worthy made his appearance, he pronounced the patient to have a severe nervous attack accompanied with fever. He had no doubt it had been produced by too long walks and by the quietness of Highriggs being too much for the spirits of a young person. He did not augur anything serious, prescribing perfect rest, and forbidding all exertion.

“As soon,” he said “as she is a little stronger we must get her over to Birkenhead, where she

will be under my own eye and where the careful nursing of Mrs. Turner and the lively society of her young friends will be the best thing for her. But above all things, nothing must be said or done to agitate her at present."

Lady Isabella was in a great dilemma. She felt that perhaps Robert's letter might contain matter of the highest importance. It might even be business of life or death. Yet Rosa could not read it, the seal was not even broken, and Lady Isabella's fastidiously honourable mind recoiled from reading, unpermitted, a letter addressed to another. In this difficulty she consulted Nelly, who decided at once that she must open and read the letter.

"Naebody though but yersel, my leddy," said Nelly, hastily quitting the room, to show that she had not given this advice with a view to gratify her own curiosity.

Following the counsel thus given, Lady Isabella broke the seal and read:—

"Dearest Rosa,

"I am forbidden to write yet, but one line

I must send, to say that I hope in two days after you receive this, I shall have the inexpressible happiness to see you once more. I will explain all when we meet. With boundless gratitude, ever your devoted

“R. C. C.

“Love to Lady Isabella.”

This was joy, at any rate, though all seemed as mysterious as ever. How anxiously, now, Lady Isabella desired Rosa's recovery! It was a comfort, indeed, that Dr. Turner thought her malady was not serious. In confirmation of this opinion, she awoke in the afternoon, after a sound sleep, apparently perfectly composed.

“What has been the matter?” she asked of Lady Isabella, who sat by her bed.

“You have had a fainting fit, my love, and a long sleep.”

“Do you know,” she said after a long pause, “I have had an odd dream. I fancied I had a letter from, you know from whom, but somehow I was not allowed to read it. It seemed so real,

and yet I know—I know it is out of the question.”

Lady Isabella did not answer, and Rosa said no more, only sighed heavily, apparently satisfied that it *was* out of the question. Lady Isabella was glad Robert was not to come for two days. She resolved to tell her the following evening.

It was the next day, about noon, as Lady Isabella was taking a short walk in the grounds, while Rosa, by Dr. Turner's order was still confined to bed, that a carriage drove within the gate. With his head out of the window, sat a gentleman whom Lady Isabella saw at a glance to be Robert Clifden. Strange to say, the blind man seemed to recognise her too, for he ordered the carriage to stop, and was in an instant by her side.

“ My friend, Lady Isabella, is it not ?” he said, and there was as he spoke an intelligence in his eye she had never seen before. His next words were—

“ And Rosa—”

"She is not quite well," and then seeing his countenance change, she added quickly, "But the doctor says it is nothing serious—only a nervous attack. She has been suffering so much from anxiety, and the surprise of seeing your letter was too much for her."

"*My* letter—is it for me she has been so anxious? or—" and his face became pale and agitated.

"She feared, although you had prepared her for your silence, that it was only that you might the better shield her from some more certain cause of distress."

"She was right. Dear Rosa! Oh Lady Isabella, am I altogether a selfish wretch, that I cannot feel unhappy on account of what you tell me? Will you take me to her now?"

Lady Isabella now explained that Rosa had not yet read his letter, and did not know of his coming. "I did not expect you till to-morrow, and I meant to have broken the news to her to-night, but I will do so at once. I am convinced it will not hurt her."

Lady Isabella judged correctly. Rosa was indeed much agitated at first, but she did not faint again ; on the contrary, after a short time, appeared to become quite well. Lady Isabella could not oppose her resolution to rise and dress immediately. Rosa felt weak, and looked pale, but all feverishness had quite left her. Lady Isabella would not permit her to come down stairs to the drawing-room, but made her go into her own boudoir, and lie down on the same sofa which she herself had occupied during her first interview with her former Companion.

“ And now, my love, Mr. Clifden wishes to see you alone, but if you would rather I were here—if you think it would be too much for you— ”

“ It will not be too much. Oh let me see him alone ! ”

Another minute and Robert Clifden was in the room. She half rose, but too weak and trembling to stand, she sank back again. In an instant he was by her side.

“Rosa! Beloved through long and hopeless years—once more I come to ask you—”

He stopped in too violent an agitation to proceed in words, but eagerly *looking* the question his lips could not utter. A strange kind of amazement mingled with Rosa’s joy.

“Robert! Robert! Surely you see me.”

“I do. Oh let us bless God for his mercies! The world is no more a dungeon to me, and at last, tenfold more precious than any sight it contains, I can see the face of my—my own Rosa. Is it not so? Those eyes I know would not deceive me, and—”

Rosa’s out-stretched hand, though not her voice, confirmed the tale her eyes had told. It was pressed to Robert’s heart and lips during the happy silence which followed.

At last she asked,

“But your eyes, Robert—was that what you were doing in Paris?”

“Yes. I will not tell you all now, my Rosa, but ere you had left me, I had resolved to make

one more effort—feeling that my whole usefulness and happiness in life depended, under Divine Providence, on my regaining in some measure my sight—”

“Robert, you ought to have known that I—”

“I knew you were all goodness—generous beyond even the generosity of your sex; but that was to me an additional reason that I should not overburden one who was too ready to bear. I did not then presume to imagine that you might suffer—but to go on. I resolved to tell no one my errand to Paris, for my mind was made up. I feared both opposition and sympathy, and I could not endure the idea of speaking on the subject. On arriving at Paris, I consulted the first oculists. One, and only one, gave me any hope, and he even tried to dissuade me, saying that the issue was doubtful, the operation most painful and tedious, and even attended with danger. Finding, however, that the risk of life was not great, I was not to be deterred from the attempt by a dread of mere

pain. I underwent the operation. It was terrible, and I was ill for many weeks, but thanks to the skill of the doctors, the kindness of Watkins, and above all to the mercy of my Heavenly Father, I am well, and can look once more on the face of my own Rosa."

He stopped, and during the pause that succeeded, both lifted up their hearts in gratitude to Him who had so blessed them. They required no words to express their sympathy. Each knew what the other felt. At last Robert said,

"You are not changed, Rosa. My poor aunt and Lady Isabella told me you were more beautiful than you used to be. They did not know that in my eyes you could not be more beautiful. No, to me you are the same, and if we live, when others may think your face fade, as they now think it fairer, to me it will still be the same, lovely with an imperishable loveliness."

As Robert spoke, Rosa's countenance became

radiant with happiness and affection. Then she asked, a faint accent of regret mingling with her joy,

“And your studies, Robert—you are able to pursue them alone now?”

“Alone! No, Rosa, I cannot study alone now, and besides, I am ordered never to use my eyes much. I shall never see well, or have really strong eyes in my life. You will not mind, Rosa?”

Rosa certainly did not mind, except for his own sake.

About a month after this time Rosa received the following letter from Fanny Wills:—

“Dearest Rosa,

“I know you must be very busy, therefore I shall only write you a few lines; but I could not hear of your approaching happiness without offering you my congratulations and sympathy. I assure you nobody could rejoice more at your good fortune than I do. How glad you must be

now that all turned out as it once did ! for this is of course a far better marriage for you ; but I know nobody who deserves good fortune so well as yourself, and I am not at all surprised that Mrs. Clifden should have seen things as she did at last. Her will, will prevent people speaking. I enjoyed so telling old Mrs. Blakeney about it the other day. She said, ‘ You might do well enough for the wife of a *rich* man.’ Mrs. Harold said, ‘ She had no doubt Riversthwaite had always been ill-managed, for she heard the servants had the care of everything and got all their own way. No wonder they were so fond of staying —she had no doubt they made fortunes out of their places,’ on which Harold remarked, ‘ That perhaps it was better to wink at a little loss to lead a quiet life. He thought perpetual changes cost much more.’ At this his wife got into a perfect rage, and gave him such a lecture, asking him if this was his gratitude for all her toil. The old lady said nothing. It strikes me she is afraid of her daughter-in-law ; but she began to coax

and fondle Harold. I should have felt very sorry for her had she not begun again about you, and said that though you seemed very amiable you were certainly very nervous and useless. Harold did not make a single remark about you. I suppose you are getting a splendid *trousseau* as you have plenty of money. Well, you are a lucky girl! and after all, the substantial goods of life are better than romance. I suppose I am as well off as I deserve to be, but many worse people have got better on. But I will not intrude on your happier lot the regrets of a poor old maid. I do look forward with delight to having you for a neighbour. Remember me to Mr. Clifden. Colonel Delaney and my sister, and my brother and his wife, desire their best compliments and they will take the earliest opportunity of calling at Riversthaite after you come home. You are a great lady now, you see.

“But if there is any one whom good fortune would not change, I do believe, dearest Rosa, it is

yourself. With fondest affection, ever your attached friend,

“FANNY MARIA WILLS.

“PS. By-the-bye, I hear Viewlands is to be sold. They say the Heatherbraes are in debt already; but do not mention this to Lady Isabella Mac Whin, as she is their aunt. I am afraid, however, it is too true.”

Rosa was married at Highriggs. It was a very quiet wedding; Fanny Wills was bridesmaid, and the Turner family were made proud for life by being present at the especial invitation of the bride. It was almost too much for the girls, not to mention their father, when, ere Robert departed with his new-made wife, he presented each of them with a valuable bracelet, thanking them for their kindness to Mrs. Clifden. The Birken-side people were of opinion that “Grace and Helen Turner’s heads were quite turned,” and that it was “disgusting to hear the way the doctor boasted of his fine friends and the break-

fast at Lady Isabella Mac Whin's;" but of course the reader will, with the penetration and candour I am sure he must possess, make some allowance for this opinion, when he reflects that no other denizen of Birkenside had ever breakfasted with *an Earl's* daughter, and no other Birkenside young ladies had as handsome bracelets as the Miss Turners.

* * * *

It was on a winter afternoon that, for the third time, Rosa arrived at Riversthwaite Hall, as her home.

The hall door was thrown open, and all the servants with Watkins at their head were ranged in order to receive their new mistress. Feeling like one in a dream, but bowing to all and shaking hands with Watkins and Emily, whose marriage dress Rosa carried in her trunk, she passed with Robert through the avenue of obsequious domestics into the drawing-room.

Grand and stately as ever was that apartment, but a bright fire, a most inviting looking chair, and a new table covered with the books and ornaments Rosa admired, created in one spot at least a more easy, homelike appearance. Rosa pressed her husband's hand and thanked him for his kindness and his thought of her. Then with a full heart she walked to the window.

The earth was covered with snow; still and sharp, the naked boughs of the grass avenue extended in two long lines, becoming misty and dim as they were terminated by the frozen river. The crags on the opposite side were dim and misty too—the pines alone rising dark above the snow, and standing out solemn and still against the silver-pale sky. A few stars began to twinkle faintly on the pale brow of night, and the beams of a crescent moon visibly mingled with the fading daylight.

It was a fair sad scene, soothing but pensive. Rosa fell into a train of thought. Bygone days glided before her imagination, till the past

seemed almost to efface the present. How many scenes she could recall in that very room—scenes of pain and depression, or of joy which was not true happiness and brought heart-break in its train! Then she seemed almost palpably to see, as in that old time, the stately figure of Mrs. Clifden, with her hard handsome face and the diamonds on her black velvet dress and large smooth arms. Again she seemed to hear the sonorous tones of her passionless voice—again to have almost the same feeling of solitude and humiliation.

From this reverie she was aroused by a voice at her ear, and in the same reverential and formal tone, in the same deferential manner with which she had so often heard him address the dignified lady of whom she had been thinking. Watkins now enquired:

“Madam, at what hour shall you be pleased to order dinner?” It seemed like a continuation of her day-dream, and Rosa almost expected to hear the sonorous voice reply.

But after a short pause the same question was repeated, if possible with additional reverence and ceremony, and Rosa awoke with a start to the consciousness that she was now Mrs. Clifden of Riversthaite.

THE END.

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